

THE

ADVENTURES IN MODERN MUSIC

# WIRED

ISSUE 173 • JULY 99 • \$2.99/US\$6.99

**Spiritualized's**  
jukebox

**Dr. John**  
here comes the  
night tripper

**Ken Vandermark**  
high NRG music

Pluramon

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your monthly exploration of new music

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# THE WIRE

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# editor's idea

**S**onically speaking (as The MC5 once put it), I am timeboxed. These last few weeks, the only music to have penetrated any deeper than my outer ear has come exclusively from the period 1970-74. That sounds very specific, but then so are my requirements. It's research, y'see, deep background for a project that will mark my return to feature writing for this magazine after a gap of two years (exciting, eh? All will be revealed next month).

Of course, when I say the early 70s I am referring to America, blaxploitation movies, Graham Central Station, Afro and dashikis, as opposed to Britain. Confessions Of A Window Cleaner, Bartley James Harvest, leather cuts and cheeseclotch.

Now I can guess what you're thinking: he's only just got round to seeing Jackie Brown and Boogie Nights in some second-run flea pit, and now he's riding the short tail of the 70s revival that flickered fashionably about two months ago. Wrong, although as a willing participant in the first 70s revival to the hit these shores (1987 was the year), I did experience a certain frisson when a new, augmented CD version of Curtis Mayfield's *Superfly* score arrived in the post just a few days before the BBC, in some freak programming decision, were due to screen *Shaft In Africa*. Both *Superfly* and *Shaft In Africa* were orchestrated by Johnny Pate. "Where is he now?" asks Greg Tate in his sleeve notes to the *Superfly* reissue: Good question, because Johnny was the man as far as creating a sonic space in which a symphony orchestra and a wah-wah pedal could co-exist in mind-blowing harmony. Reference books are useless in providing an answer to Greg's query, of course. Show me a book with Johnny Pate in the index and you can name your price.

News that the Soul Jazz label are to follow their exemplary compilations of early 70s Nuyorican salsa with a collection of early 70s Latin rock also reminded me of the paucity of decent literature devoted to the greatest musical genres ever, as well as dovetailing neatly with my frozen-in-time listening habit.

Unless you have a hotline to the archives which Izzy Sanabria was writing for *Latin New York* magazine in the early 70s, just about the only place you can read about 70s Latin rock is a few tantalising pages in John Storm Roberts' 1979 classic *The Latin Tinge*. The impact Of Latin American Music On The United States.

Actually, Latin rock as a phenomenon was more an

example of the impact of United States music on Latin American radicals like Randy Ortiz. If pushed, I'd have to say my favourite Latin rock LP of all time is 1974's *Love Is* by Randy's group Segunda who "sprang from the core New York salsa market", according to Roberts, but morphed into a bardo version of Earth Wind & Fire under Randy's ambitious guidance. Everything about the record typifies that defining early 70s characteristic, excess. Track titles like "Afro-Rican Sals Parts I & II" and "Opus-18 Nos 1 & II", a personnel list that runs to 29 names, and an instrumentation that includes Moog and BM1 synthesizers, electric violin and clavinet alongside the standard trumpets, trombones, bongos and timbales. As for the music, that is equally over the top, an hysterical mix of fusing percussion, electronics, symphonic soul charts, post-Hendrix unison riffing and bardo vignettes.

*Love Is* was produced by Larry Harlow, who made his own contribution to 70s excess with *Tommy*, a Latin rock opera inspired by The Who's *Tommy*. Why should I find the prospect of a Latin rock opera so appealing, when the thought of *Tommy* induces bouts of nausea? It isn't about fashion — and since when were Latin rock operas fashionable, anyway? No, the reason is all in the detail, and it's where talking about Latin music, or blaxploitation soundtracks came to that, then the detail is all in the rhythms.

Basically, a group like Segunda could sustain the kind of top heavy baroque ornamentation that captured so many rock groups of the time because they had a rhythm section that could hold it aloft with some of the most dynamic, empathetic group playing this side of a West African drum orchestra. As Randy Ortiz put it, "You take the bass and work from there. The solos can be anything".

So this music was heady and bodacious combined. Regardless of what was happening elsewhere in the mix, the maintenance of the groove was imperative, and collective endeavour triumphed over individual ego, a notion you would have been hard pressed to get past Pete Townshend in 1974.

I look forward to renewing my acquaintance with Randy Ortiz and Larry Harlow on that Soul Jazz compilation, but for now you'll have to forgive me. I have research to do and a feature to write. Now who knows anything about a Latean version of Beethoven's Fifth complete with mellotron and five-piece conga section?

TONY HERRINGTON

The August issue of *The Wire*: on sale Tuesday 28 July

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# soundings

Selected highlights of the month's live events, happenings, club spaces and broadcasts

## Festivals/Special Events



Jeff Mills in London and Gent

**Meldown** The John Peel curated transcendent music festival cranks up this volume in its final week (until 5 July) with Sonic Youth, Spiritualized and The Delgados (RFH, 1 July 7:30pm) then on 2 July a tribute to a reggae night with Culture and a Fire Sound System (RFH, 7:30pm), Glasgow label Creeping Bent showcase (Purcell Room, Bpm) Extreme Noise Terror, Herzbow, Aube, CCCC, Hago's Peter Rehberg and Russell Hurlwell (QEH, 10pm); then Jeff Mills, Luke Vibert, Plug and KUI, Dag 400 (RFH, 3 Bpm), Jesus & Mary Chain, Susie and Add N To X (RFH, 4, 10pm), Blur's Damon Albarn & Graham Coxon, Silver Apples (RFH, 5-7 30pm), London South Bank Centre SE1 various prices, call 0171 960 4242 for full details

**WOMAD** Global music, art and drama festival of 50 artists from 23 countries with Abdullah Ibrahim Trio, Ladysmith Black Mambazo, Cornishop, Placo Jimenez, Susana Baca, the Okavango artist Neneke and 60s Asin groove merchant Andra Shankar, and DJ sets in the White-pigeon tent 24-26 July. Return featuring weekend ticket £58 day tickets £17-27 50 information line 01225 744 494

**Inventing America** Horne Hancock, both with the current quartet and the original Headhunters, is this month's highlight of the Barbican's year of American culture (118 and 19 July, respectively). More jazz from Michael Brecker (S), McCoy Tyner (11) Marcus Miller (16). Plus soul godfather James Brown (22,

23); blues from Taj Mahal (26), funk from Bootsy Collins (29). All concerts 7-9pm, various prices. London Barbican Silk St, EC2, 0171 638 5403

**Rhythm Sticks** Drumming up a passion for percussion on London's South Bank (18-26 July) are Bill Bruford's Earthworks, Peter Erskine (18), David Toop and Peter Lakota (19), Henrique 'El Negro' Hernandez Victor Mendez and Giovanni Hidalgo (20), Evelyn Ginnies, Ensemble Bash and Backbeat (25) RFH, QEH and Purcell Room, various times and prices, 0171 960 4242

**Indian Voices** Learn to sing various Indian classical styles in seven days? If you're a quick learner join Ragan and Sagar Phara TV Guggoludran, Senta Devi and Bhikshu Sanyal, 2-8 July, 9-30pm-5:30pm, School of African and Oriental Studies, Thornough St, London WC1E, live £150-£120 concessions. However, concerts featuring the aforementioned talents, are free. Call 0181 742 9911 for details

**Ten Days Of Techno** Vanspeed beats and textures from around the world raise the heart rate in Gent, Belgium, featuring Groenewald, Surgeon, DJ Spooky, Detroit's Jeff Mills, Carl Craig, 3000 People and Derrick Jay Buckskin, 3-10 July, 9pm-7am each day, Star Building, Rokinweg 5, 9000 Gent, tel 00 32 226 4963

**Nicholsdorf Confrontations** High level improv and jazz summits in Austria featuring Cex Taylor, European Quarter, Gerry Hemmings, Quintet, Kochi/Schubert/Ruff, Kaffe Mathews, John Law, Peter Kowald 17-19 July, Jagdschlösschen Nicholsdorf, Unt. Hauptstrasse 13, A-2425 Nicholsdorf, tel 00 43 2146 2359, fax 2146 2776

**Montreux Jazz Festival** Stretching the definition of jazz to include everybody from Bob Dylan to Beak, and Pierre Henry to Nina Tuli, A Brazilian theme brings in Manisa Monte, Gilberto Gil and others, plus funk surf from Bootsy Collins, P-Funk All Stars. Jazz isn't entirely forgotten, Lee Konitz, Paul Blek, Charlie Haden, James Carter, Les McCann, Cassandra Wilson and Al Jarreau hold up the flag 3-18 July, Auditorium Strimling and Miles Davis Hall, Montreux Jazz Festival, Service de Location CP 1325, CH-1820 Staveland 1, Switzerland info and tickets 00 41 900 555 618

**30x3m Festival** International new music in various shapes and sizes, headed by Terry Riley in a duo with Italian bass player Stefano

Scordibello (25 July). Other highlights include Austrian-German hi-Tech/no from Piattinger on a bill with Moscow Composers Orchestra (26), and a Javanese gamelan orchestra (27). 23-27 July, Theatre d'Arles, Marseille. For full details contact AMI: Fichie Belle de Mar 23 Rue Gubail 13331 Marseille tel 00 33 491 11 42 52, fax 491 11 42 53

**Tonic** John Zorn curated 40 night concert series, already up and running (until 26 August) in a former kosher winery on New York's Lower East Side. Zorn's abundant highlights include Zorn's Masada String Trio (1 July), Arto Lindsay (3), Zorn again with Marc Ribot, Medusa & Wilkins (5), Vernon Reid (8), Parkkari, Jose Muniz (9), Charles Gayle (16), Zoro Parkers (22), Ron Colvins (24), Min Xiao-Fen (25), William Parker (26), Joey Baron & Baron David (31). All shows 9pm and 10:30pm, Tonic, 107 Norfolk between Rivington and Delancey, New York, call 001 212 358 7503

**Festival Of Central European Culture** An uprising of new republics, from Austria to Bosnia Herzegovina covering music, film, theatre, politics and art. As the provocateurs whose presence has agitated all central Europe and further afield, the festival's musical highlights is Lachini 10 July, QEH SE1 0171 960 4242. The festival itself runs until 12 July, various venues, times and prices. For programme contact Guy Chapman Associates, 10-14 Packerin Street, London WC2B 5NF, tel 0171 242 1855

**Fraktura** An experimental music festival first for Liverpool, opened by Kaffe Mathews at Everyman Third Room 19 July. Then Tony Bevan and local improvisa duo bwhhwhse (10, Blackwell garden). Fraktura Big Band John Janowski/Rob Danton (11, Blackwell courtyard). Tel 0151 733 2288

## On Stage

**A Tribe Called Quest** Flytopping Hip-hop harder hitting rap, with support from Gang Starr, London British Academy, 16 July, 7pm, £16 50 advance, credit card hotline 0171 924 9999

**Jack DeJohnette's Oneness** Veteran jazz drummer's trio, London QEH, South Bank SE1, 26 July 9pm, £15/£10 0171 960 4242

**46,000 Fibres** Improvisational, would you believe London Red Room 12-29 Seven Sisters Road, N7 26 July 8pm, £3, 0181

767 4657

**Triok Gordo** Into jazz rock fusion with his group Gordo London QEH, South Bank SE1, 25 July, 7:45pm, £15/£10, 0171 960 4242

**Instant Music Meeting** Improv sessions featuring Voltage (17 July), Gil Brand Phil Currant, Pat Thomas and John Boset (24), Jon Debn, John Edwards, Charles Hayward and Caroline Kraabel (31). London Centurion 1, Deaford Broadway SE8, all concerts at 8:30pm, £4/£3

**Macrosomica** Post-rock spin-off from Telstar Pomes London Upstairs at the Garage Highbury Corner, NS, 1 July, £4, 0171 607 1818

**Memories Of Mongolia** Mongolian cello singing specialist Michael Grinnon heads a fundraiser for Mongolia at London's Tibet Foundation Cultural Centre, 2 Bloomsbury Way, WC1, 5 July 8pm, £8/£6, 0171 404 2889

**Project Dark** An Exposed By Grandpianos live Webcast of archival art, turntablism London Cyberia Internet Cafe, 39 Whitehall St, W1 30 July, 8pm, 0171 833 0204

**Spleen** ex-PJ Harvey band splinter group London Garage Highbury Corner NS, 2 July 5:30 0171 607 1818

**Trans Am** US group instrumental in the spread of new-vocal rock, London The Garage, Highbury Corner NS, 2 July 5:30 0171 607 1818

**Karusishi Uchihaishi** Guitarist from Japanese rock inspires the Allured States teams up with NYC percussionist Sam Bennett, London Spina, 109 Commercial St, E1 5 July 8pm, £8/£6 0171 392 9032



Jack DeJohnette at the QEH

PHOTO: JEFF MILLS: BOBBIAN



Ananda Shankar at WOMAD and The Big Chill

## Club Spaces

**A Little Head Music** Live Electronic with acts still to be confirmed, hosted by the Merry Pioneers, London Powerhaus, 24 July 10pm-4am, £8/£6, 0181 951 5490

**Antioch** Le Recordings studio whizz and trumpet maestro Richard Thomas appears live in this low-key monthly bash. Plus, for all you connecting machine fans out there, a film of the one in Portland, London Basement, Fergusons Walk, 2 Essex Road, N1, 8 July, 8-11.30pm, £3, 0171 725 9624

**Brai Non Stop** Future funk, jazz, alternative Techno and Sutra. Milton Keynes Zaks Studios, 7.30-10.30pm, free, 01908 220232

**Big Chill** Headlining this Indian Summer event in West London, cult 60s *Asari* Rare Groove star Ananda Shankar makes a rare UK appearance alongside State Of Bengal, Earthtone, Nelson Odom, Badmarsh Shm and Outcaste Sound System, London Shepherd's Bush Empire, 17 July, 9.30pm £15/£10, 0121 924 9999

**Blue Note** To mark the relocation of Haddon's red-eye magnet to its new home in Islington's Complex, the multi-faceted club is planning an early July festival featuring Blue Note regulars Herbie Hancock, Axiom fusion jazz quartet, Ananda Shankar, Giles Pearson, Barmley Rhythmic Ace, Dave Clarke, before embarking on its new regular schedule in August. London Complex, 1 Parkfield Street, N1, from 9 July, details 0171 288 1986

**Electronic Lounge** Scanning the crowds for new electronic sound, with DJs Robin Rimbaud, Tony Morley and special guest, London ICA, 7 July, 9pm-1am, £2.50/£2, 0171 930 3647

**Euroleite** Second of two nights combining DJs from Austria and Slovenia. Viennese mayhem fans in the shape of the Cheap labels Pularing and Tunkan, performing alongside the UK debut of the Haase duo. From Slovenia, DJs from the Radyojo Sound System Team provide an interlude before live performance from seven-piece dub-jazz outfit Heavy Lee Warriors, London 333 Club, 333 Old Street, EC1, 9 July, 10pm-3am, £6/£5, 0171 739 5949

**Irregular** Second wave of outsider exponents hosted by the Blast First label, WWW

(Vince, Violation and Vinga, aka Pun Sonic, and Alan, the Suicide vocalist) play their only UK date together, with Hölger Hiler (Jing), London Africa Centre, Kingsly Street, W1, 2 July 8pm, £8. At the end of the month, former Cab man Richard H Kirk plays his first London gig in five years, with support from Russell Howell, London Upstairs at the Garage, 23 Bpm, £6, 0171 607 1818

**Kosminche** Redfux, minimal trance rock merchants, with three basses, headline the Kwait Inbaite club, Robert Harrison, Eddy Current and Horton Jupiter spin the Schlager and the usual cabaret applies with a visit from art punmiles Holstov, London Upstairs at the Garage, 18 July, 9.30pm-3am, £5/£4, 0171 607 1818

**Liquid** Italian event organisers touch down in London for the second in their monthly residency. This month's best-carabinieri include DJ Bagge Casseta, London Junglist Aphrodite, Lem J Naby, The Myl Boys and Sadebian QJ Young. There's also a roomful of firms and projections with an exotic Italian theme, London 333 Club, 333 Old Street, EC1, 8 July, 10pm-3am, £4/£3, 0171 407 4642

**New York Sushi** Phoket, Panshy, L. Double Justin Robertson, Tony Vegas and Oee July Punk Rock celebrate American Independence Day at this Sheffield bonanza (4 July), Sheffield Music Factory, Saturdays, 9pm-late £8-£6, 0114 267 1869

**Pey-Phi** HipHop throwdown from San Francisco featuring the ill-demand Peanut Butter Wolf and singer Racco (9 July), plus a DJ set from Vienna's Richard Dorfmeister (23), Glasgow Sub Club, Jamaica Street, Thursdays, 10pm-3am, £4/£3, 0141 248 4600

**Raya** Atmospheric engineering at the ICA. By: with Senior Marsh, Robot Films, Centiv8 & Exaggerated Dance Co. OJ Tevo and Simon Haggis, London ICA, 24 July, 8pm-1am, £4/£3.50, 0171 930 0493

**Saatchi Machine** Packing them in off the beaten track in Black Lane, with Tontasia, Pad, Phone and assorted DJs, London Vibe Bar, 81 Park Lane, E1, 16 July, 10.01, 0171 247 3479

**Schetch** Michigan art collecting Warren Decker's new record. His Name Is Alive celebrate the release of their new 440 album Fort Lake with this live show, backed up by

## Radio

### National

#### BBC Radio 1

**Andy Kershaw** Monday 8.40-10.30pm World Music from all quarters, folk, roots, reggae and a new **John Peel** Tuesday-Thursday 8.40-10.30pm The best place to keep up with new rock, indie, Techno, Lounge, Electronic, dub and the legendary sessions  
**John Peel** Friday 10.30pm The best of the best, from the original jungle dons  
**Wendy Matthews** Saturday 1.30pm-3.30pm Saturday Night Takeaway! Tins hit including **Topshop** and **Arnie Nightingale** Sunday 4-6.30pm **Chilled** eclectic sounds for the après clubber

#### BBC Radio 3

**Phonetic** Monday 10.45-11.30pm Eclectic rattabag of new sounds, reviews and interviews, hosted by Robert Sandil and Mark Russell

**Beat And New** Friday 10-12pm Contemporary music magazine, interviews, record reviews, sessions. This month: **Arctic** (Quintet in concert) (3 July), **Sonic** (orchestra at 10), **London Sinfonietta** play **Massimo Carrà** and **Wendy Matthews** (17)

**Jazz On 3** Sunday 11.30pm-Jane Proulx jazz recorded in concert. Highlights this month: **John Peter** (18 July), **Herbie Hancock & Headhunters** (23)

**World Music** Sunday 17.15-17.45pm Ethnic explorations via field recordings. This month: **Songs Of The New World** - American folk music (5 and 12 July), traditional Ethiopian music (19 and 26)

### Regional

#### BBC Derby

**Soundscape** 5-6pm Andy Francis plays instrumental Electronic contemporary music, New Age, Jazz, Folk

#### BBC Greater London (GLN)

**Bob Allen** Wednesday 8-10pm 1 (radio) 10.30pm Electronic, Big Beats and dub in **Belt**  
**Charlie Gillett** Saturday 10pm-12pm Rock, roots, dub, World Music, blues, R&B and more

#### BBC Lancashire

**On The Way** Sunday 12-3pm Steve Barker's featured New Wave mix, dub, instrumental electronics and lots, free inputs and more

#### BBC Merseyside

**The Late World** Sunday midnight-2am Old rock, psychedelia, Jungle, avant dance, warped Ambient and global beats in featured sequences

#### CRME (Milton Keynes)

**The Gates Of Larnay** Wednesday 10pm-1am **Sham** Quartet's blend of avant rock to electronic, pop/rock, with **Interspace** (17)

#### Kiss 103 FM (London)

**Harriet** Wednesday 10pm-11.30pm Late rock, dub, bass, span by the master  
**Glenn B. Up** 10.30-11.30pm Late rock, dub, bass, span by the master  
**Best Break** Friday 10.30-11.30pm Specially recorded sessions and in-studio appearances  
**Prost** Friday 10.30-11.30pm More breakfast than a chippy the most  
**The Chill Out Zone** Sunday 6-8pm Paul Thomas's experimental Ambient, dub and Electronic mix  
**Patrick Forge** Sunday 8-10pm Eclectic, acid, rock, jazz, dub Nu and Old School electronic innovations  
**Giles Pearson** Sunday 10.30-11.30pm Continuing the above, into the final hours

#### Kiss 103 FM (Brighton)

**Tony Ward** Sunday 10.30-11.30pm Late rock, dub, bass, span by the master  
**Best Break** Friday 10.30-11.30pm Specially recorded sessions and in-studio appearances  
**Prost** Friday 10.30-11.30pm More breakfast than a chippy the most  
**The Chill Out Zone** Sunday 6-8pm Paul Thomas's experimental Ambient, dub and Electronic mix  
**Patrick Forge** Sunday 8-10pm Eclectic, acid, rock, jazz, dub Nu and Old School electronic innovations  
**Giles Pearson** Sunday 10.30-11.30pm Continuing the above, into the final hours

#### Kiss 103 FM (London)

**Kerry Cameron** Monday-Friday 9-10pm Alternative/field music of all stripes  
**John Kennedy** Thursday-Friday 10pm-11.30pm Sunday 10.30-11.30pm Dub, Electronic, experimental Ambient

angry electronic noisesters 2nd Gen and OJ Friendly Scientist (aka ex-Pale Saints/Spoorhead Hybrid man in Pinkies) London Spot, 109 Commercial Street, E1, 30 July 7pm-midnight, £11/£5, 0171 228 6616  
**The Spazoo** Gong weedy and free! from 16 July, this multimedia mash-up presents the Igton Records collective (16), OJ, Apache 61 and 10.50 (21) and Kute (30), plus residents 3H-civil and BT Home London Global Cafe, 15 Golden Square, W1 Thursdays, 7pm-midnight, free, info 0171 700 7569

**Tangent** New Island signings The Jeep Gritz bring their twisted doses to this emergent Scottish space (31) Glasgow Sub Club, 10 and 31 July, 10pm-3am, £8-£5, 0141 576 1343 The Tangent also party for this month takes place on 4 July at a secret Scottish location: phone above number for details  
**1001 Nights** (Bibi) dissidents The Islamic Daggers mix Moroccan trance with drum 'n' bass. Techno with ra at their new weekly slot in Soho, London Global Cafe, 15 Golden Square, W1, Fridays from 11 July, 7pm-1am, free, info 0171 372 2260

**Soundings terms:** for the August issue should reach us by **Friday 10 July**. All clubs and venues out of London - we want to let you know! So let us know the who, the what, the where and the wherefore

# letters

**Write to:** Letters, *The Wire*, 45-46 Poland Street, London W1V 3DF, or fax: 0171 287 4767, or e-mail: [the\\_wire@ukonline.co.uk](mailto:the_wire@ukonline.co.uk) Please include a full name and address. Every letter published wins a FREE CD

## Watch the fur fly

I have no particular objection to dealing with any member of the press. I'm a staunch defender of our fifth amendment and its British equivalents. However, I resent being portrayed as an incongruously angry person (*The Wire* 172). Perhaps your readers would be interested to know some of the statements, not questions, that Howard Mandel made to me (I've gotten into the habit of taking notes during interviews).

- No white people would like my record
- No one at the *Wire* liked my record, and thought it was terribly event garde (quite a disheartening way to start an interview)
- That he disliked Raymond Scott's music
- That my current record "wasn't deep", kind of OK background music for a party at best
- That seeing my Bug Music band was weird because of the visuals: what were the "dreadlocked guy" (in this context, a barely cloaked euphemism for saying that I'm black) and this "chubby Jewish piano player" (I'm Cane) doing playing that music?

This last comment is particularly toxic because it implies that there's a set of things I should be doing? Is the freedom to explore different music a privilege reserved only for white musicians? Is it cooler for The Squirrel Nut Zippers to swing badly than it is for me to swing well? Clearly, we're in racial territory, especially when one considers the freedom that white musicians have to pursue whatever music tickles their fancy.

All the while, background comment after background comment, I wouldn't get a fair shake, because he would never print what he said. I have had my differences with the stifling orthodoxy of the jazz press over the years, but this is a different issue altogether. An interview, as an event, should be an opportunity to find out where the artist is at, not the time to condescendingly attack the artist for parts of his work that personally bother the interviewer. And ultimately, the state of defensiveness I was goaded into by his rudeness allowed him to write his article in the sceptical tone he'd intended all along, without having to take any responsibility for his own intent to disparage me. It's not the right to be criticised that I take offence to, but the lack of civility and respect shown to me by a man of Liliputian intellect.

The time and place for an alleged journalist to air his gripes is in print. Can anyone imagine being able to maintain a cheery demeanour while you're being dished, not in print but to your (telephone) face. I totally expect the cunning Mr Mandel to deny my

accounts of his behaviour but I'm willing to submit to a polygraph if necessary. And, by the way, I'm a proud graduate of New England Conservatory, not Berklee.

**Don Byron** Woodstock, USA

We print Don Byron's letter to allow him the right of reply. However, we feel it is necessary to point out that we take issue with just about everything he says, and believe that he completely misunderstood Howard Mandel's intentions during the interview, a belief borne out by Howard's article, which was full of praise for many aspects of Byron's music. Furthermore, to imply that Howard is a racist is an outrageous slur on a writer who has consistently championed the most radical forms of black music. For the record, *The Wire* has no problems with Don's new album (if we did, we wouldn't have featured him in the magazine), and we certainly don't think it is "avant garde" (quite the opposite, in fact) — Ed

## Well hung Parliament

Peter Shapiro's interesting Primer on Funkadelic's Parliament (*The Wire* 172) was conducted with the usual impressive authority that one expects from *The Wire* these days. I have been a fan of the various permutations of the group for more than 20 years, and one of the crowning ironies of George Clinton's innovations was that they were universally ignored. Still, better late than never.

It is true that the recent generation of rappers have used 5-funk samples to an overwhelming degree on their recordings, but early Funkadelic were deemed too extreme by whites and blacks alike. I can recall playing their music to some people who listened to funk music back in the late 70s, and they were dismissed as an oddity. The same fate also befell Bad Brains and Fishbone, gifted black groups who slipped between the cracks because of their eclectic approach to their chosen music. It was no surprise that George Clinton should cite Sun Ra as a major influence, another maverick who was treated as a figure of fun in his lifetime.

Noted critic Cliff White once remarked in a review of Funkadelic in the mid-70s that if the group had been white, they would be much better known. So what's new? It is a regrettable fact that the first true inheritors of the Hendrix spirit spent much of their formative years in near obscurity because their faces did not fit the frame. Eddie Hazel should have gone down as one of the greatest guitarists of the last 30 years, but was passed over for lesser talents. Even his death a few

years back merited little column space. One cannot help but feel that black innovators always appear to be shabbily neglected (Ra, Joe Harriott, Anthony Braxton, Otis Wright, Swamp Dogg, Junior Byles, etc).

In addition to the recordings mentioned by Shapiro, it should be noted that Funkadelic's *Live At Westbrook 12* (September 1971) is another essential item, as it contains the definitive version of "Maggot Brain". Newcomers should look out also for Parliament's *Tear The Roof Off* (1974-80), a superb compilation, highly recommended for those on a tight budget.

**Rob Jones** Letchworth

## Iron Jackie

I've been buying *The Wire* for 18 months now and I like the way you meticulously explore music, focusing as much on the music as on the personalities behind it. I don't expect reviewers to be inherently impartial or blindly objective and, generally, it seems *The Wire* writers lend an open ear before formulating a response.

But Ed Baxter's perfunctory portrait of Jackie Leven in his live review of *Disastordome!* (*The Wire* 171) was so blindly and offensively subjective that nothing at all could be learned from reading it — the lady Celi, his rugby socks worn outside his trousers — ? Please! This is just rudeness and not what I thought *The Wire* was about. The rest of what Baxter had to say about Leven was beligerently bigoted to the point of irrationality.

Jackie Leven's music is challenging, innovative and daring. His guitar technique (hardly mentioned by Baxter) is extraordinary, building on the legacy of players like Davey Graham and Bert Jansch. To my knowledge no musician before Jackie has explored their miscelaneity as a starting point for honest self-discovery. The hackneyed old male bonding trope that seems to constitute Baxter's limited frame of reference is tedious, unworthy and uninformed. It doesn't take much, I think, to hear that these are brave, impassioned, pioneering songs, whose confessional style lays them open to ridicule. David Thomas was right in saying "most people can't handle the truth". Baxter, please note.

**Steve Moore** Weymouth

## Corrections

Issue 172: In Soundcheck, Dysfunctional should have been listed as being distributed by Cargo, not Vinyl Solution. DNR is distributed by Vital, not S&D. The letter e in Pierre Maréchal's name went missing in the e-mailed dispatches of Brian Duguid's review of Terry Riley's *Pierre Maréchal's Keyboard Study 2* (intimate 1).



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# bites

## Max Brennan

### Loving the alien

Living on the Isle of Wight, Max Brennan stands in splendid isolation from London's treadmill of novelty-hungry clubs. Leaving it to the metropolitans to tailor bespoke tracks to the tight specifications of club culture, Brennan instead celebrates difference and diversity in his intricate mingling and matching of jazz fusion, Techno and HiHop.

"It's not so much how I want to be, it's more how I am," Brennan comments on his pluralist approach. "I'm into so many things, it's difficult not to let them slip into a track, and because I'm not in a city doing a specific track for a specific kind of scene, there's not quite so many restrictions on what I'm doing. There's really no club scene down here, so my influences have to come from all over the place rather than just a great night out in a club."

Away from the bright lights of clubland, Brennan has generated an extraordinary volume of work, released under such pseudonyms as *Freelless AZM* (taken from the initials of his young family) and *Universal Being*. But of late he has come clean and put out his most compelling tracks under his own name for the Japanese label *Sublime*.

Alongside a brilliant series of EPs and 12"s, the two albums he's released so far are good indices of his music's abundant flavours. *Freelless AZM's* *Oceans Of Light* is an almost perfect antithesis to the determinism of club tracks, with pieces like "Lost" harnessing jazzy keys, funky bass licks and Acid synth textures. But the album's most striking moment is its title track, where Brennan submerges the groove in an echo chamber swirl of sound. "I suppose the *Freelless* stuff is more organic sounding," says Brennan. "It used to be a little bit more 4/4 but it's started to lean more away from club music."

Currently Brennan is most preoccupied with *Alien For Whom?*, his debut LP for *Sublime*. Tighter arrangements, cleaner production and a cleaner set of themes distinguish it from his pseudonymous productions. But his characteristic flair for hybridisation flowers on the opening "1300 Milliseconds Of Brass", which grafts together crisp Electro beats, Detroit Techno synth pads and the strange, uplifting trumpet stabs which give the track its title.

Here, Brennan's compositional method of linking disparate musical forms mirrors the title track's theme of making contact with alien lifeforms. But some critics read the title as a retort to the confusion generated by the otherworldliness of the music:

"I suppose *Alien For Whom?* could be taken on all levels," Brennan conjectures. "I meant it in a pure alien way, but it's quite good that people have taken it in a musical way."

Like fellow UFO obsessive Juan Atkins, Brennan's first instrument was bass guitar, which he was inspired to take up by *The Stranglers* and *Public Image Ltd.*, specifically their *Metal Box* LP. Then he discovered the jazz and funk of *Herbie Hancock* and *Sly Stone*.



Hearing *Gang Starr's* jazz-inflected HiHop and the deep bass pulses of *Miaou's* *Basic Channel* productions inspired him to seize the means of production. He says, "I was really inspired by the idea of samplers and computers and being able to control them to create something I really wanted to hear rather than just playing bass in a band."

But his music isn't completely computerised. It bristles with lilting guitar melodies and slapped bass licks, albeit heavily compressed, which he also layers over the sequences and samples in his live set.

"It's down to the way I dance," he laughs. "I'm a compulsive mimmer. Sometimes the music gets too cold or a little too machine driven and I end up just bobbing up and down. I love to jump on a keyboard line and mime to it while I'm dancing. I really like stuff that's full of licks. That's why I started playing in the first place, because I decided it was time for me to put a real instrument in my hand after years of miming."

**PIKE SHALLCROSS** *Alien To Whom?* is out now on *Sublime* (through *Pinnacle*). *Freelless AZM's* *Oceans Of Light* is on *Holistic* (through *Klutas/Pinnacle*).

## Aube

### Nocturnal noise emissions

"I don't know whether *Aube* is music or art," admits Akilum/Nakayma, better known as *Aube*, the prolific creator of noise and Ambient music. "Perhaps it's just the design of sound and packaging."

Each *Aube* album starts from a single sound source. Since his first release in 1997, these have included fluorescent lamps, solitary voltage-controlled oscillators, water, wire, an "executive decision maker" air, metal and telephones. The pieces he constructs from such seemingly unpromising sources range from mesmeric, repetitive ambience through to cathartic torrents of noise. His releases are often as much art objects as





albums, existing only in tiny micro editions and dedicated to the obsessive examination of their material. When possible, he cues a sleeve's substance and design to the sound source.

"The packaging and design are very important for me," asserts Nakajima. "I want to keep each release united with the sound source as much as I possibly can."

True to his word, Aube's *Aqua Syndrome* CD (Manifold Records) came as a limited edition packaged with a bag of water, while the music was evolved out of the sounds of liquid in motion. The even more limited (to 12 copies) *Book Depth*, a MiniDisc on Nakajima's own GROSS label, was packaged in black glass, and used noises generated from glass. 1995's *Wired Trap* (Self Abuse) processed recordings of steel wire, 100 copies of which were sheathed in wire mesh.

Elsewhere Aube has got hold of medical equipment to pick up sounds from the body as the base material for many records. The recent *Evocation* CD (Aut Abwachen) features brainwaves transformed into audible signals by an electroencephalogram. For the most part the end results imitate chaotic but serene birdsong.

Nakajima elucidates: "The sounds in the body, like brainwaves, the lungs, heartbeat, blood vessels, these are usually not heard very well. But I have a mysterious image of the body, and what kinds of sound are within. My albums using these body sound sources are my way of expressing my image of the body."

If *Evocation* imagines the body at rest, other releases investigate the body in torment. Several tracks on the double CD compilation *Substructural Penetration* (Inn Light) suggest the body pushed beyond its limits. In this mode, Aube bears companionship with fellow Japanese noise/punker Merzbow, seeking out moments of catharsis when sound escapes normally tolerable confines.

In keeping with his day job as an industrial designer, Nakajima often works to form a record company can request a sound source for him to tailor according to the requirements of the label. "It mainly depends on the

label's style and desires," he says. "I like to try my best for the labels which kindly offer to release my recordings. If they tell me to be as free as I like, then the type of music may depend on my current mood."

The title and sound source for the recent *Pages From The Book* (Else And Jack Recordings) were suggested by label boss James Rodriguez, who chose the rustle of Bible pages rubbing together. Initial copies included pages torn from the Bible which Aube "played" on the disc. He is conscious of the risks involved in dabbling in religion: "I'm always interested in both the sound itself and the image from the source," he states. "I was worried about the use of the Bible, and I'm not anti-Christian. The label told me there would be no problems, so I did it. My sounds are a peaceful and delicate representation of it."

Some people argue that Aube's music is repetitive and hence disposable; he might use the same sound source across many releases, while most pieces vary little from their central idea. Well, that's like saying Henry Moore's over-reliance on sculpted bronze got dull. Aube doesn't really fit in the music industry cycle what with its demands for artistic progress and diversity of product. Viewed as art objects, however, as products of a single-minded sound sculptor, his music makes for more sense. Placed in the context of minimalist art, Aube's textures suddenly sound surprisingly rich.

"Noise music is a kind of sound from the city," Nakajima tells me. Although he lives close to the crowded shopping streets of central Kyoto, the modern city contains an ancient capital of traditional shrines and temple gardens. Aube is variously described as a musician, designer and sculptor. Perhaps he is best seen as a temple gardener, who is patiently working his way through the plain grey gravel, smoothing it out, creating grooves here, listening intently to the garden stream and imagining therein a whole new world of sound. **BRIAN DUGUID** Aube appears in London this month as part of *Meltdown*. See *Soundings* for details.

bites

## label lore

No. 633

### Bomb Hip-Hop



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Run by David Paul

Roster includes Turntablists DJ Faust and Crime; rapper Profound, DJs/beatmakers Paul Nice and RUD2, producer Baby J.

**Brief history** Before unveiling its record label in 1994, *The Bomb Hip-Hop Magazine* issued two *Headz* by a then unknown Automator (of *Dr Octagon* fame), Charisma and Peanut Butter Wolf. The first release, a rap compilation featuring Madchild (with DJ Q-Bert).

Blackalicious and Mystic Journeymen, was followed by the scratching albums *Return Of The DJ Vols 1 & 2*, introducing the world to the turntable wizardry of Inesabi Scratch Pickett, Beat Junkies, Cut Chemist, and Rob Swift (X-Men). Recent releases include rap compilation *Bomb Worldwide*, and full-length albums by Canadiana Cipher and DJ Faust.

**Statement of intent** Major record companies use and manipulate media (print, visual and audio) to brainwash music consumers into viewing Hip-Hop as rap only, and control availability by pushing out independent releases with huge marketing and promotional campaigns. Bomb Hip-Hop intends to use some of these same tactics to re-educate our audience, giving a bigger picture of Hip-Hop (DJing, MC'ing, B-boy'ing, graffiti).

**Other activities** Sister record label Bomb Basic with UK artists Krespy and Jeep Beat Collective, and Hip-Hop group Metastab N Bread (Australia). Bomb map other catalogue featuring B-boy, DJ and graffiti videos, mixtapes, etc. Website at: [www.bombhiphop.com](http://www.bombhiphop.com)

**Future plans** Man Of Myth DJ tour with DJ Faust, Shorttee & Graze. 1998 releases include DJ Des's *Ancient Territories*, alternative Hip-Hop compilation *Contents Under Pressure*, DJ Faust, Shorttee & Graze's *Featureless EP*, rap compilation *Dropout The Bomb*, Paul Nice LP, and rap compilation featuring New York MCs produced by UK beatmaker Baby J. *Return Of The DJ Vol 3* and other releases will be coming in 1999, as well as the relaunch of the Bomb clothing company.

*Words and graphics: David Paul*



## Ivo Perelman

### Unlocking the beast

"I never had an interest in free jazz," declares Ivo Perelman, the much-in-demand Brazilian saxophonist whose playing enravens an increasing number of recorded summits emblazoned with his name. "I never thought that I would play the way I play. It just used to come out of me."

He struggles to articulate his dilemma. "How can I say this in English?" he despairs. "Something came down on me. It was frustrating because I would practise lines and then, when it was time to play, I became that thing, that ferocious beast. It was horrible because I couldn't restrain myself."

Getting himself into a state where he could lose all sense of restraint didn't come easy. Indeed, he didn't even discover his instrument until he was in his mid-twenties. He started young as a classical guitar student before disillusionment and a love of Deep Purple and U2 prompted him to turn electric. But it didn't last. A stint as a cellist in a student orchestra followed. "I would have played the cello all my life," Perelman claims, "if I didn't have problems within the orchestra. I

wouldn't play in the 'correct' position, and that was profane. I was also improvising, and I was banned from the orchestra." After piano failed to satisfy his freer leanings, he switched to woodwinds before finally trying out the tenor sax in his early twenties. "It was love at first sight," he says. "I felt totally at one with the instrument. It wasn't me, it was it, and I was being it while I was playing."

At first he dug Stan Getz's bossa nova recordings, but soon got round to working his way through the canon of Sonny Rollins, John Coltrane, and Wayne Shorter. He moved to the United States before his wanderlust took him to Canada and across Europe. He recalls gigs in France which became "really ugly" — he was even thrown offstage in Paris. On studio dates he could never relate to producers who would demand "Sanborn on a sad day."

Then in 1989 Perelman made his first recording for an LA independent label with Arto and Flora Purfin, John Patuazo and Peter Erskine. It explored Brazilian folk forms and children's songs. "I had no idea it would come out the way it did," Perelman claims. "I was pleased, and shocked. It was like looking at a mirror for the first time." Two more recordings followed, completing a trilogy exploring Brazil's African, European and Indian heritage. He continues to explore this rich seam of folk material in a free jazz context, although he now says, "I've exhausted

the theme. Now I'm more obsessed with the sheer sound, the fabric of music. Music is very boring. There are only 12 notes, and there's only a few things you can do. If I could play a different instrument every time I play, then I would be the happiest person. But it doesn't work that way. You have to commit, and that takes a lot of discipline." His commitment to his instrument has been rewarded with partnerships with key figures in contemporary free music. He has cut two notable discs with pianist Marilyn Crispell, one a set of traditional Jewish songs, the other pure improvisation, *Sad Life* and *Live* followed, recorded on consecutive days in 1996 with Rashid Ali and William Parker, and released this year. *Live* wasn't planned. It came about after Perelman met a fan who recorded the set on a Walkman. "I try to be judicious that the recordings are distinct," Perelman says, "and there's something unique in that performance, a raw, unrelenting energy."

Forging on in a markedly non-linear musical progression, the recent *Strings*, a live duet with guitarist Joe Morris, documents Perelman's return to his 'apprentice' instrument, the cello, and his singular vocal technique. More significantly he has finally set up a long term trio with former Cecil Taylor bassist Dominic Duval and drummer Jay Rosen. Astonishingly, the trio had never met before they recorded the live free jazz of *Seeds, Vision And Counterpoint*. Duval and Rosen were substituting for an indisposed rhythm section at the eleventh hour. "We hardly had time to warm up," recalls Perelman. "We just went in, and boom!"

Inspired by Duval's electronic processing, Perelman is "trying to think electronic, to incorporate that into my playing". He has also just completed a CD with Duval's CT String Quartet (named after Duval's mentor, Cecil



Taylor), *The Alexander Suite*. Despite further plans to collaborate with string players, vocalists, percussionists and French horn, Perelman has it in mind to eventually get "back to some raw energy form derived from the rock era". Clearly, he is a long way off from his mature sleepers and standards phase. "I hope I don't run out of tricks too soon," he muses, "because then I'd be very bored." **TIM OWEN** *Strings, Seeds, Vision And Counterpoint* and *The Alexander Suite* are available on Leo (through Castillo, Imperius, These)

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# The Azusa Plane

## Universal rock theory

"I wanted to create something musically that I could call my own," asserts The Azusa Plane's Jason DiMilio. "I wanted to release a body of work that was mine, that failed and succeeded on my terms."

Basically a solo recording project for his lo-fi rock guitar improvisations, DiMilio conceived The Azusa Plane with a tightly contained body of work in mind. He had planned a ten-volume cycle of vinyl singles, intending to terminate the group after the final release. However, their rapidly proliferating discography, taking in CDs, shared 45s and cassettes released across a range of labels, put paid to his neat design. Besides, not only is there far too much music pouring out of him to be contained in just ten singles, but his structured improvisations need a full-length album to pick up speed. Winding DiMilio's DIY/do-or-die approach: The Plane's evocatively titled new double CD, *America Is Dreaming Of Universal String Theory*, is an epic, sprawling traversal of the rock hinterland. Recorded over the past year, it documents DiMilio's gradual drift towards "100 per cent improvisation."

"It has been a natural progression from the early recordings," he continues, "which were actual songs and overdubs all written and laid out in advance, to the current status of The Azusa Plane. The track 'Strings 2' is actually structured improvisation. It contains seven three-minute parts, which are all improvised with a

general theme or sound in mind before hitting 'Record' on the tape machine, but they are structurally placed to fit and blend with each other." Other tracks, however, capture the pure, sometimes brutal spontaneity of The Azusa Plane in full flight — "Strings 7", for instance, about which DiMilio says, "It is very satisfying to plug into a distorted, overdriven amp and just pound on your guitar, just thinking about the sounds, and as they develop, just forget everything you have learned about playing the guitar correctly."

The paradox of such intuitive music is how a practice as progressive as improvisation is so easily grounded in something very primal. "In music all trends come and go," DiMilio reasons. "Everything is recycled and reshaped. There is nothing more rudimentary in music than noise. Everything has been done, we are starting again."

DiMilio began The Azusa Plane as an extension of his record collecting. "It sounds like a cliché, but I had a four track, a guitar and some extra cash, so I put out a single."

Momentarily modest about the musician's status — based in Philadelphia, DiMilio describes himself as "just a guy from American suburban recording sounds" — he nevertheless recognises the cathartic impulses behind his music. "We have to try different things and make music that provokes," he emphasises. "Why else would we do it? The days of great mega rock bands are over. You have to make music based on emotion. It has all been done, but I try and make real music for real people."

For live work The Azusa Plane expands into a duo with guitarist Jason Knight, or a trio with drummer Quentin Scobitz.

The live experience, DiMilio contends, is "100 per cent different. The recordings are done with the goal of



creating a pleasant and interesting listening experience. This does not translate well onto the stage. Live, we are a rock band, no matter how unconventional, which means you have to entertain and rock. Now that may sound like a radical notion, but it got lost in the post-1993 apologetic indie rock circle."

The Azusa Plane might consider if their duty to rock, but they don't let it compromise their commitment to spontaneous expression. "If something doesn't feel right I can just move on," DiMilio admits airily. "It was never expected to last this long," he reiterates. "I assumed it would either fail or simply that it would have concluded the ten volume set by now, but the whole experience has just mushroomed. It has grown a mind and life all its own."

**TOM RIDGE** America Is Dreaming Of Universal String Theory is out now on *Corvina Obscura* (through Cargo)



## fast track

**DEAN DRUMMOND of microtonal ensemble Newband warns Rob Young of an impending crisis in the future of Harry Partch's original instruments**

**We've heard that Harry Partch's instruments are under threat of eviction from their current storage/rehearsal space. What's the story?**

Newband (which carries Partch's instrument collection) has been told to vacate the spaces we occupy at Purchase College Conservatory of Music, New York State, by 20 August 1998. I first heard about it several months ago when a colleague pointed out to me that Newband's space was reassigned in next year's course catalogue.

**Why is it so important for Partch's instruments to remain in that particular space, or one like it?**

It is desirable that the instruments are performed upon by excellent musicians, which are in ready supply in the New York metropolitan area, so the instruments

need to be housed somewhere convenient to the city. Presuming that the instruments and their legacy have educational merit, a university setting is ideal. Purchase College is 45 minutes from Manhattan and is one of a few educational institutions with a large enough facility to house Newband's instruments. The instruments and their cases occupy 2000 square feet minimum space and require reasonable climate control. The musicians and composers that work with the instruments require at least a minimum amount of creature comfort for the long hours spent practising, rehearsing, composing, studying, etc.

**Where did Partch himself store them?**

Mostly in universities such as University of Illinois, California State University at San Diego, but also a converted laundromat in Venice, California. Since Newband acquired the instruments in 1990, they have lived in a loft in Midtown Manhattan, a high school in Nyack, New York and at Purchase College since 1993.

**Why do you think the Dean of the college is showing such disrespect for these musical/cultural treasures?**

The new Dean's position appears to be that he needs the space for education. It is quite a long story, but evicting the Harry Partch Instrument Collection is one

of several accomplishments for which he has been criticised. BOD students signed a petition against his approach to decision-making.

**What would be your ideal scenario regarding the long-term preservation of Partch's legacy?**

The ideal would be to have a permanent space in Manhattan that could function not only for rehearsing, practising, composing and instrument repair, but also for performances and a museum. Another ideal situation would be preserving the originals in a museum, while replicating one or more (improved) sets for performance. Ideally, we hope that Harry Partch's instruments and music — and new music being composed for the instruments — become more popular, so that more instruments will have to be built and more musicians can play his music.

**What's the best way for Partch fans to register their outrage at this situation?**

Frankly, we need help affording our own space more than a further registration of complaints, which have fallen on deaf ears. Donations to Newband, both large and small, are needed and appreciated. — Newband perform in the UK in November. To contact Newband, fax 001 914 353 6935 e-mail [drummond@purchase.edu](mailto:drummond@purchase.edu). Website: [www.purchase.edu/newband](http://www.purchase.edu/newband)



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# global ear

## Fes

"This is just like a set for *King Kong*," draws an American spectator as we enter the impressive square of the Bab Magina for the opening night of the Fes Festival Of World Sacred Music. Surrounded by fortress-like walls, it is located at the edge of Fes's old town, Medina, the world's largest surviving medieval city, whose narrow, winding alleys mercifully protect it from the intrusion of modern traffic.

The branch of Sufi scholar Dr Fauzi Skali, the Fes Festival is a place where people of different faiths get together to celebrate each other's music. The idea, which came to Dr Skali after the Gulf War, won the patronage of the King of Morocco — no mean feat, as it takes courage to stage a multicultural festival promoting Christian and Jewish musics in a Muslim country.

On the other hand, Fes is a city with longstanding religious and intellectual traditions. Its Karouine University became a magnet for philosophers, mathematicians and astronomers way back in the ninth century, when Europe was still in its Dark Ages. Fes also has a strong Sufi tradition which, with its emphasis on direct mystical experience, migrates against orthodoxy gaining a hold.

Architecturally, Fes was fortunate that French colonisers left the old city alone, building the attractive Ville Nouvelle to house most of the city's hotels and banks. The old Medina, meanwhile, still functions as a warren of trades, crafts and homes in much the same way as it did 500 years ago, apart from the odd satellite dish.

The festival opened with a curious double bill featuring African-American opera singer Barbara Hendricks and an extraordinary singer from Uzbekistan called Monjeet Yulcheva. Hendricks sang a programme of Mozart and negro spirituals until her set was cut short by a downpour. Yulcheva is something of a folk heroine in Uzbekistan, because she carried on singing Sufi songs during the Soviet era, when — so she told me over mint tea in the gardens of the Palais Jamas hotel — it was

A survey of sounds from around the planet. This month . . .

forbidden to mention God in songs (she carried on singing, omitting the word if necessary). She also sings a song form normally restricted to men. Alongside its Persian and Arabic elements, her music unearths the buried 500-year history of the brilliant Central Asian courts of Boukhara and Khiva. Already booked to play the prestigious Theatre De La Ville in Paris, Yulcheva looks set to emerge as World Music's next crossover star.

The Baghdad faction was represented by the Iraqi singer Hissayn Al-Azami, backed by the Al-Kindi ensemble (whose else could Iraqis and Americans share the same stage?). Their music has evolved out of Turkish, Semitic, Persian and Kurdish influences into a highly sophisticated classical music, by way of the Maqam al-Iraq (Iraqi mode). So sophisticated, in fact, that much of it lost me. I could thoroughly appreciate some of its elements — the virtuoso nay (Arabic flute), oud and kanun players, the complex interweaving of the rhythms — but the whole picture evaded me.

Banking off the festival one night, a group of us caught Sad Gey's extraordinary Aesawa group in an interior courtyard somewhere in the old city. Unbelievably intense drumming combined with the booming riffs of the ritar trumpets designed to wake the faithful for early morning prayers while also alerting them to the danger, and the whining feedback of the small al-tara horns, to completely disorientating effect. Indeed, the music induced several observers to fall into a deep trance.

Though they were from closer to home — Ireland — Anura were also a revelation to me. This group perform a repertoire of ancient Celtic-Christian songs based on manuscripts and texts found in the sixth century monastery of Glendalough, albeit updated by their director Michael McGlynn. Their clever choreography moves the voices around the performing space — the courtyard of the Batha Palace, with its stone basins, bamboo stalks and rose trees. My experience of

contemporary Christian music is mainly negative — aside from some gospel — but this was white soul music from the heart. It is earlier, more sensual and playful than the Holy Minnells. They rarely perform, but in Ireland, they never have to advertise: they only need to let their making list know to pack the house. Even the Pope approves of them. Symbolically enough, this group of young singers, comprising Catholics, Protestants and atheists, were performing on the day Ireland voted in favour of the Peace Agreement.

Performing under the Volubilis, a fourth century Roman arch where lions were once caught for the Colosseum, were Sidi Tahani M'Ghagni's Malhun Ensemble. Malhun is a semi-classical genre dating from the 12th century, mixing Koranic stories and popular songs with contemporary political references. Originated by wandering singers, it had become an essentially academic style, but there's a revival on at the moment, with a warmth and fire you wouldn't expect from such courtly music.

If one singer encapsulated the spirit of the festival, it was the Jewish Cantor Albert Bouhadana. Born in Morocco, he now sings at a synagogue in Paris. Here, he sang Hebrew songs to the Andalusian music of the Orchestra Of Fes. The music spread when the Jews and the Arabs were expelled from Andalusia in the 15th century, and can now be heard throughout North Africa. Bouhadana told me that many Muslims would come to hear him singing Hebrew songs. Conversely, he loved singing Moroccan popular songs in Arabic, while his rabbi was a big fan of Egyptian film music.

Seeking to pin down the special magic of the festival, I caught up with Gerard Kurdjian, its artistic director. He felt it had to do with the atmosphere of the holy city, which intensified the effects of the music. Indeed, towards the end of the festival, more and more people were speaking of it as a spiritual encounter rather than a musical event.

Another highlight was the chance to hear a Greek Orthodox choir from the famous men-only monastery on Mount Athos. The final act were from Konya, Turkey, the famous Sema ceremony where Rumi founded the Mevlevi Whirling Dervish sect. In the grand square of the Bab Magina, the dervishes spun this extraordinary festival to its conclusion.

PETER CULSHAW

Arch performance: Sidi Tahani M'Ghagni's Malhun Ensemble at Volubilis





# driving while black

Bennie Maupin

His car doesn't need any keys  
(there's no way of saying) reflected images

when

Ron Steiner wrote a Concerto for guitar and Orchestra  
and the London Symphony played it

Ornette's still amazing story of America  
(Ornette died by walking through your  
living part of it)

Ornette talking to Stockhausen and Sly  
Stone and howling  
there was no big difference  
it was all music

Then met a long time ago

Then

Speakers become "keyboard instruments"  
and guys  
just playing whatever it was  
on crossed-over  
(it's all right it's a tough way to enter a heavy  
but your children that for sure)

and then (or longer) young boys said  
"I hope you'd  
hope had and electric jazz  
(they said) but two boys

Doesn't the real thing

And the new park ethics  
bored it along.

Well you started it  
an more there

and listened with Ornette to Sly  
and Stockhausen  
and down  
in westwood hotel rooms  
in Buffalo

and now we're back  
and the knob-talker

We never really met easy

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RHYTHM INSTRUMENTS

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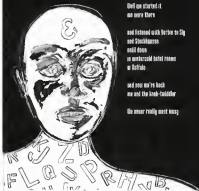


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**M**alcolm John Rebennack Jr. is among the last of a dying breed. Born in 1940, he has been playing music professionally since he was 16. In the 50s and early 60s, he did session work for historic New Orleans labels like Ace, Specialty, AFO and Mint. Ironically, he didn't hatch his Dr John persona, a hybrid of the legendary hucksters and gamblers and the voodoo myths attached to New Orleans, until he left the Crescent City for LA in the mid-60s. The mysterious character emerging from the early Dr John records got him invites to guest on sessions for, among others, Aretha Franklin, Iron Butterfly, Phil Spector and The Rolling Stones. On his evidence you don't have to be a mathematical whiz to conclude he has probably played on more great rock 'n' roll records than anyone else.

Having played with just about everyone worth playing with, he is the Kevin Bacon of the music world — no musician is more than six degrees of separation from Mac Rebennack. All of his know-how comes to the fore on his new album, *Anarchy Zone*, which plunges Paul Weller, Spiritualized's Jason Pierce, plus members of Supergroup, Portishead, Primal Scream and Ocean Colour Scene into the filthy Louisiana bayou and drags them kicking and screaming on a second-line march through the history, folklore, tall tales and wit of popular music's richest tradition — the Creole swing of New Orleans.

**R**ebennack grew up in New Orleans's Third Ward which, at the time, was about as integrated as any city district of the American South was likely to get. "The Third Ward is mid-city of New Orleans," Rebennack explains. "When I grew up there, if you went across

Tulane Avenue in one direction it was very black, right on the edge of it was mostly Cuban, and then when you got close to where I was living, it was mostly Irish and German. There was a lot of transit people all along there, from the Caribbean or wherever, but it was like a transit neighbourhood

on top of that. So you got a lot of different influences in one neighbourhood there."

The first musician to really get drunk on New Orleans's potent multicultural brew was Roy Byrd, aka Professor Longhair. Occasionally recording under comic names like Professor Longhair And His Shuffling Hungarians or The Four Hairs Combo, Byrd approached Jelly Roll Morton's piano shuffles, Champion Jack Dupree's barrelhouse boogie woogie, calypso and rumba tunes with a rhythmic and vocal sensibility that can only be described as nebulated. "His whole concept was off the wall," Rebennack remembers fondly. "He would tell me things like, 'Man, I want to make a record with all these banjos playing snare drum parts. And I want the tubas to play the bass parts and the trombones to do these elephant things.' He was so cool because he was in his own world. I think that a lot of guys that start off as dancers — he started off as a hooper — in fact, all of the piano players that started off there became a different kind of thing."

Rebennack would eventually work with Byrd, producing his "Mardi Gras in New Orleans" track. Byrd's physical approach to the piano caused some technical problems in the studio. "He would hit [the piano] where the foot pedals were — that was his bass drum — and the way he kicked it so hard, that always went on the records. By the time I got to produce his record, Cosmo Matassa, who ran the studio, discovered that by putting a board up on the piano and padding it you wouldn't hear that. To me, looking back at it, I love hearing other records like John Lee Hooker, hearing him stomping his foot while he's playing guitar, but hearing that sound of Byrd kicking that piano, there's something special about that. Back then, it just added confusion to the recording."

Though Longhair only ever had one medium-sized national hit in the US (1950's "Bald Head"), he was (and still is) a talkman of the Crescent City sound. "It's funny," Rebennack reminisces, "whenever we'd be on a session, Huey Smith, Allen Toussaint, James Booker and maybe a couple of other piano players, in between takes they'd always play some Professor Longhair thing. That was like the codeword to play something more funky. Somebody played a little bit of 'Tipitina' in between takes, and all of a sudden, the band got the message. Let's play the next take kind of funkier."

Longhair's music was the first popular style to



PHOTO: DAVID ELLIS/REUTERS

# a walk on the weird side

New Orleans is the city where blues, jazz and rock 'n' roll got possessed by voodoo spirits and Mardi Gras madness. Concocted out of its music and myths, **Dr John** personifies its Creole culture. Using the Night Tripper's memories as his map, Peter Shapiro charts the Crescent City sound, from Professor Longhair to The Meters

Dr John in the 70s (left) and now (above)

incorporate the 'second line' rhythms of New Orleans's brass bands and Mardi Gras Indian tribes. Like the revelers at calypso carnivals in the Caribbean or the samba schools of Brazil, the Mardi Gras Indians act out ritualistic boasts and dances in outrageously ornate costumes in one last orgiastic celebration before the Lent fast begins. Their rhythms revealed their Afro-Caribbean roots. "There's a strong relation between Afro-Cuban music and second line," Rebennack explains. "People would just play around and combine the essences of the grooves. Originally, second line was that 'boom-chicka-boom-ch-bom-ch-bom-boom-boom', and then that basic rhythm became part of the New Orleans thing to the point where people just felt that and played around with it. That's when the funk got to what people know today."

"It started changing in the 50s, but I'd say by '60, '61, what the drummers was doing led to Zigaboo [Modeliste, of The Meters] and led to the guys like Idris Muhammad and Earl Palmer who did something else with it. When Smokey Johnson [a New Orleans session drummer] went up to Motown, it had some kind of effect on the way Motown records got funkier. When that happened it was like a change in the way they approached something. All those kind of things led to George Clinton or Jabo [Starks] with James Brown."

With his huge backbeat and tight snare sound, it is generally accepted that Earl Palmer was the first funk drummer. An impeccable session player, Palmer played with Dave Bartholomew's group on records by Fats Domino and Lloyd Price, and out in LA with Eddie Cochran and Thurston "Little Bitzy Pretty One" Harris. But Rebennack credits another New Orleans drummer, Charles "Hungry" Williams, with making things really funky. For proof, listen to Williams rping it up on Jerry Byrne's Rebennack-penned "Lights Out" (Specialty, 1958), where he creates a speed-demon groove that out-little-Richards Little Richard. "Hungry wasn't anything but a funky cat and no matter what he played [it] was funk," he asserts. "He didn't know nothing else. The fact that he had a trick left hand and a trick right foot, he could keep the groove with just a hi-hat and his ride cymbal or whatever he was beating on. I liked it because he wasn't even necessarily playing on the drums. He would make grooves on the side of the bass drum. He could play anything with his right foot on the bass drum and anything with his left hand, but he didn't misuse that. He wasn't some showboat guy. He just used it in odd ways that were not what jazz drummers do, called independence method. He used it in what the funk drummers do, called alternation method. It just opened a door: playing the beat on one instead of two and four, or playing it on one and three, or playing a straight four and playing the bass drum on the upbeats. That led to where it was considered hip, when Diana Ross cut "Baby Love" or The Four Tops cut the "Sugar Pie, Honey Pie" song [ie "I Can't Help Myself"], but it was already old in New Orleans, because we'd been seeing Hungry do that for ten years at that point."

Rebennack was still in high school when he was introduced to the New Orleans music scene by Walter "Papoose" Nelson, guitarist for Fats Domino. After hours of comping and learning Mickey Baker licks under Nelson's rigorous tutelage, Rebennack began hustling some of his songs around town and deeping for his mentor on session work. He eventually took an A&R producer job at Johnny Vincent's Ace label, where he worked with New Orleans legends such as pianists Huey "Piano" Smith and James Booker, vocalists Frankie Ford, Bobby Marchan, Joe Tex, Eddie Bo and Chuck Carbo, wild bluesman Frankie Lee Sims, saxophonist Alvin "Red" Tyler and guitarist Earl King. The Ace recordings were all produced at Cosmo Matassa's J&M Studio, just like every other New

Orleans session — back then, it was the only studio in town.

"Cosmo was an engineer, but don't even connect what Cos did to what engineering is today," Rebennack cautions. "He basically was the guy who set the mikes in place, turned the machine on, and as soon as the producer said, 'Take!', he might go to the corner and have a drink or something. If there was a false start, someone had to turn the machine off or, if they didn't know how to use it, send somebody to go get Cos it was kind of loose."

"It went on like that for years. I'm not saying it happened on every take of every session, but it happened a lot. It added something, though, the fact that when somebody played a solo, the sax player had to come up to the mic, the guitar player had to turn his amp up, stuff like a regular band does on a gig. It wasn't like cutting in a studio. If there was a piano solo, all of a sudden the band's just playing softer. It makes the dynamics happen, it made

## “People kept telling me: Don't get high around Frank Zappa. He don't get high”

everybody real aware of playing together.

"I always remember when Roland Cook played bass on a session," continues Rebennack, "the first note when he was tuning his bass, it blew all of the studio's speakers. We had to cut the date without hearing any playback. Cos could hear it in his headphones, but we had no idea what we was cutting, we'd just see Cosmo hand his headset back and forth to Paul Gayten, or whoever was producing the session, and he'd listen. We never knew what we cut, but that's life, you just see. I remember, too, when there was a big hurricane and we were trapped in the studio. All the juke went out and we couldn't get out because there was flooding in the streets, there was just no getting out. When the juke came back on, we finished cutting this session like nothing had happened, though we had been trapped in there for over a day."

While at Ace, Rebennack recorded what he considers his finest record with a man who was about to help change the shape of jazz: Ornette Coleman's drummer, Ed Blackwell. Trouble is, it's never seen the

light of day. "Blackwell didn't play a backbeat, he was playing some abstract loose funk type



The Meters

rhythms," Rebennack recalls. "We were rffing on some songs that was popular at the time, like the Peter Gunn theme. When Johnny Vincent heard us, he decided this stuff's going in the can. I'm sure it's still sitting there—if it's not in the garbage can by now it's not the first and it won't be the last."

Around the time of these scrapped sessions (1960), Specialty's point man in New Orleans, Harold Battiste, realised his plans to start his own label, called AFO. Along with Berry Gordy's Motown and Juggy Murray's Sue label, it was one of the first black-owned record labels in the US. But unlike the others, Battiste's was a politically aware artists' collective (AFO stood for All For One). Sharing the dream were AFO studio players like drummers John Boudreaux and James Black, keyboardist Willie Tee and bassist Chuck Bada, whose phrasing and rhythmic figures influenced jazzers like Cannonball Adderley and Joe Zawinul, as well as much of the funk to come.

AFO struck gold immediately with Barbara George's glorious 1961 single, "I Know (You Don't Love Me No More)", but the label's faith in brotherhood was quickly destroyed by Juggy Murray, who screwed the company in a distribution deal with Barbara George. The deal had far-reaching repercussions. Great records by Dints 'n' Dray (Rebennack and Ronnie Barron), The Trick Ticks, Prince La La and Tami Lynn were quickly buried — if they were released at all. Worse, the deal dethroned New Orleans as the world capital of rock 'n' roll and R&B. "AFO went out to California after the Barbara George deal with Juggy Murray went bad," Rebennack explains. "They went out there to do some gigs and get a studio thing happening, because the studio scene in New Orleans was getting really you know, the union was giving them trouble and they didn't even know what overdub meant. They was stopping sessions because of the word, even though they had no idea what it meant. We was so behind the times mechanically. They continued doing hit records with Sam Cooke and Phil Spector out there, but some of the guys didn't like it out there, so the band started falling apart and the label became a remnant of what it started out as."

When the studio sessions in New Orleans dried up, Rebennack followed Battiste and the others to California, where he immediately found plenty of work. "I did stuff with Rene Hall and Johnny 'Guitar' Watson that was R&B, and I could relate to that," says Rebennack. "But then there was the Phil Spector and Sonny Bono stuff and other guys' stuff that just fell into zones. I had nothing to draw off of to know what was going on or even to know what to play. It was real foreign, but it was some kind of learning experience because it was like new turf. I was working sessions for Don Costa, Marty Paich, Sid Feller, it was a whole different universe. It was so far removed from New Orleans because they had contractors. They had names for jobs that we had never heard of. Watching Phil Spector make a record in two whole recording studios, it's like, 'I wonder why he needs all this stuff. What's he doing? Why do they have 46 strings in that room and there's, like, 15 rhythm section guys in this room and there's, like, two horns? What is this? There's some weird stuff going on here.' It just felt weird, you know?"



Charles 'Hungry' Williams with Ed Blackwell, 1976



Allen Toussaint, 1974

Things got even weirder when Rebennack did some work for Frank Zappa. "I had a lot of fun rehearsing with Frank's band," he says. "By the time he fired me out of the thing when we was doing 'Monster Magnets' [ie 'The Return Of The Son Of Monster Magnets' from 1967's *Freak Out!*] or something, it was, like, [guitars] Elliot Ingber kept telling me, 'Don't get high around this guy. He don't get high.' I was like, 'You gotta be kidding me.' I lived in this pad, there was nothing but dope dealers and pimps and whores around there. There was nobody straight around there. And they'd all get nervous when they'd see Frank Zappa come and get me for rehearsal. I was thinking, 'This guy's way out there. He's doing something I don't know what his story is, but he's cool.' In fact, he brought me up on charges for walking out of that session. I mean, Jesus Christ, I couldn't believe it. I was almost through with the date and I got Les McCann to take over for me and I left. This guy brought me up on charges and then he didn't have to pay me for the date after that. And he didn't pay Les for sitting in for me. I liked Frank's band, though, they was opening up some turf. This thing's open to a lot of stuff and it's going in all directions and I loved it."

Out in California, Rebennack became more than just a fine session musician, he metamorphosed into Dr John. The Night Tripper. Based on a real Me, 19th century root doctor, Rebennack's new persona embodied the hoodoo of New Orleans's rhythmic and religious heritage. Capitalising on unused studio time booked for Sonny & Cher, Rebennack gathered round a host of Crescent City musicians — Battiste, guitarist Ernest McLean, percussionist Didimus Washington, drummer John Boudreaux, saxophonist Plas Johnson and vocalists Shirley Goodman (of "Let The Good Times Roll") and "Shame, Shame, Shame" fame), Tami Lynn, Ronnie Barron (who was originally percolated in to be Dr John) and Jesse Hill (whose 1960 single, "Ooh Poo Pah Do!", is arguably the first funk song) — and concocted an atmosphere, funky, mystical, moody incantation to the spirit of the bayou that would become the first Dr John album, 1968's *Grins-Gro*.

Dr John was "not only the grins-gins and the santeria, the orishas and the candomble, but all of those things mixed in with the Mardi Gras Indian thing, which has got all of that mixed in too, anyways," asserts Rebennack, recalling the character's conception. "Also adding into it some old minstrel show stuff, like the Rabbit Foot Minstrels kind of thing. Mixing it all up and presenting it as some kind of show was always in the back of my head. Actually, it was in the front of my head."

"I used to be fascinated walking into Dr Wonder's store and the Cracker Jack drug store as a kid," he continues. "They had so many things, it was better than a museum, it was better than seeing the Salvador Dali painting at the Delgado Museum of Art. There was things in there, you know, you'd walk in there and see somebody's hand just sitting there with a candle burning on the middle finger and with an eye painted on the palm of it, and maybe a dead chicken hanging there with a cigar burning in its mouth. There was something about just walking in there that fascinated me, dem bones, monkey's paws, those roots. It always drew me

"Gns-grs I believe in totally," Rebennack affirms. "Everything is grs-grs. There's no black, there's no white. Everything's in the grey areas [grs is French for grey]. Everything is seen and unseen, just like that. I ain't a religious kind of guy, but I got some spiritual understandings that lean me in the direction to know that there's a great spirit up there, and the spirit kingdom is more powerful than just this meat world, because you see when people croak how short their meat is going off dem bones. But there's something powerful in that air, no matter how much smog and pollution we send up in it, there's still enough for people to breathe."

A few albums followed in the same mould (*Babylon*, *Remedios*, *Sun Moon And Herbs*), but already Rebennack's New Orleans drawl and voodoo shuck were dragging the music into the realm of schlock. Aware of the danger of self-parody, Rebennack didn't so much change direction as dig deeper for his roots, paying affectionate tributes to classic New Orleans R&B on the 1972 album *Gumbo*. Along with covers of Professor Longhair's "Tipitina", Ray Charles's "Mess Around" and the Mardi Gras Indian chant "ko ko", the highlight of the album was a Huey "Piano" Smith medley. Smith was the main songwriter and arranger at Ace from 1956 to 1960. Like every other Crescent City keyboardist, he was also a Longhair wannabe. Recording with The Rhythm Aces, later called The Clowns, he used to incorporate Longhair's piano style and parade rhythms into rock 'n' roll with a playfulness so infectious people were willing to overlook the fact that The Clowns' lead singer Bobby Marchan was a drag queen. Smith was responsible for the swing on records like "Little Liza

Jane" ("Don't You Just Know It", "High Blood Pressure", "Well, I'll Be John Brown", "Sea Cruise", "Roberta" and "Everybody's Whinn"). The group was certainly not short of talent — their driver was the future Dolomite and Avenging Disco Godfather, Rudy Ray Moore.

While *Gumbo* was a celebration of New Orleans's musical history, the next two Dr. John records, *In The Right Place* and *Destiny*, *Bonnavoo*, were recorded with The Meters, who were arguably the best instrumental group in the world and the culmination of the city's proto-funk tradition. Produced and arranged by New Orleans legend Allen Toussaint, *In The Right Place* and *Destiny* *Bonnavoo* became Rebennack's most commercially successful albums. The records also marked the end of his Cajunian exile.

"I wasn't in New Orleans when The Meters came about," he remembers. "I was shipped out of there. When I got back to New Orleans, I remember going to Cosmo's studio and The Meters were cutting 'Look-Ka Py Py' and they were killing me. I knew about them, but hadn't heard them, and they was doing that thing."

Listen to Joseph "Zigaboo" Modeliste's drums on *In The Right Place*'s "Life" and you'll hear "that thing." No one outside the Elvin Jones-Rashied Ali school of beat shrapnel played polyrhythms like Zigaboo. Just for good measure, he also had the tightest backbeat this side of The MGs' Al Jackson. But as their masterpiece "Look-Ka Py Py" shows, the Meters were not all syncopation: no funk troupe had as strong a sense of the space between the beats. The holes were not just created by Zigaboo's

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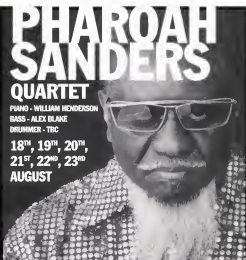
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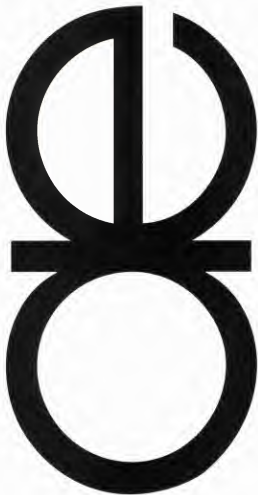
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Huey "Piano" Smith

outlandish grooves meeting George Porter's bass precision, but also by the unique coming of organist Art Neville and guitarist Leo Nocentelli.


The Meters were effectively Allen Toussaint's house band from the mid-60s onwards, playing on Aaron Neville's "Tell It Like It Is," Lee Dorsey's "Working In A Coal Mine" and "Everything I Do Gonna Be Funky," and LaBelle's "Lady Marmalade." Before recording with The Meters, Toussaint was the producer/arranger/songwriter at Mint Records from 1960 until he was drafted in 1963. Corresponding with the years between Buddy Holly's death and the emergence of The Beatles, this period, musically speaking, is generally dismissed for its bleaching and blinding out of rock 'n' roll, the calm before the impending storm of the British invasion. Yet during his stint with Mint, Toussaint was making sensational R&B records: Ernie K-Doe's "Mother-in-Law" and "Te-Ta-Te-Ta-Ta," Jessie Hill's "Ooh Poo Pah Doo" and "Whip It On Me," Chris Kenner's "I Like It Like That," Benny Spellman's "Upsick Traces (On A Cigarette)" and "Fortune Teller," The Showmen's "It Will Stand" and Irma Thomas's "Ruler Of My Heart."

When Toussaint returned to New Orleans from the army in 1965, he immediately scored a hit with Lee Dorsey's "Ride Your Pony." The follow-up "Get Out Of My Life Woman," has perhaps the most legendary beat of any record save for The Incredible Bongo Band's "Apache." As Rebennack remembers it, "Allen brought in June Gardner, who was not known for being a great funk drummer, but for being a great big band drummer, to play on 'Get Out Of My Life Woman' because he wrote a part for the drums. And I was like, 'That's some cool shit, Allen.' Aside from The Meters, Toussaint also worked with Chocolate Milk, who played more straightforward funk than 'New Orleans' funk, but still made solid tracks like "Time Machine" and "Action Speaks Louder Than Words" in the mid-70s.

**"Everything is gris-gris. There's no black, there's no white. Everything's in the grey areas."**

On the new Dr. John album *Anutha Zone*, Rebennack makes direct recourse to his past, perhaps hoping to recover the voodoo charm that made Gris-Gris such a spellbinding record. Given his connections to New Orleans's tradition of beat sorcery, however, Rebennack's most vital contributions to contemporary music are his old grooves. Ever since Steady B sampled the intro to "Right Place Wrong Time" in 1988, Dr. John's beats have been in demand in Hip-Hop. "I like the one LL Cool J just did," Rebennack declares. "He used something from my *Desireville Bonnaveroo* album, called 'Stealin'." I thought it was kind of hip. Some of them buffaloe me though, man. My eldest son, he played me Beck's thing where they sampled something from "Gilded Splinters" and I'm like, 'I can't even hear it.' And he says [with comic exaggeration], 'Can't you feel that ambience in the background?' That happens a lot.

There was one of them groups with PM in it and they was playing me this thing, 'Do you OK it?' 'Yeah, because I wouldn't even know you did it if you hadn't been sat here to do this. Then there's the ones I don't like. There was one of 'em that was like 'I wonder what possessed dese guys to do this?' I OKed just because I don't know the hell of what's going on with any of it today. But somebody played it to me later after I first heard it and they had remixed it, and I kind of liked it. But originally it was like, 'Jeez, what is this? What are they trying to do?' But it was in the mix and that's where I miss a lot of stuff, because people remix. That word is very lterable in this day and age, you got remix records forever. There's even machines now where you can remix George Clinton and it's like, 'What are they doing? But if they get a kick out of it, that's cool with me.' *Anutha Zone* is out now on Parlophone (through EMI). All of Dr. John's Atlantic Records back catalogue has been reissued on Atco (through WEA).

A photograph of three men standing in a large, industrial-style space with a high, vaulted ceiling made of a complex metal truss system. The man on the left is partially cut off by the frame, wearing a black t-shirt and looking upwards. The man in the center has a beard and is wearing a blue button-down shirt, looking directly at the camera. The man on the right is bald with a short beard, wearing a grey button-down shirt, and also looking at the camera. The lighting is somewhat dim, with light coming from above, creating a moody atmosphere.

The energy levels raised by Chicago reeds player **Ken Vandermark** have won rock audiences over to the high intensity improvisations of his many projects, including The NRG Ensemble, Vandermark 5 and Steam. Words: Jon C Morgan

# vandermark generator



Ken Vandermark (far right) and The Vandermark 5

“We were talking about Sun Ra earlier,” remarks Ken Vandermark, “and saying that part of his ability to translate his music to people who don’t normally listen to that kind of stuff was his willingness to play. You know, ‘Give me a room and I’ll be there!’ I believe very strongly that the music that we are working on here, the good stuff will also stand up in any kind of situation.”

“I mean, the last couple of years, I’ve learned so much,” he continues, “and there is no way I could have done it without performing on the regular bass I have been.”

If jazz is the teacher, Ken Vandermark majors in the difficult but rewarding field of new school improvisation. Never passing up the challenge to test or tax his playing skills on tenor saxophone and bass clarinet, he has schooled himself in the clubs and rehearsal spaces of Chicago. After years of intense cramming, he has not only graduated with honors, he’s now teaching jazz a few tricks of his own. Currently, his music ranges across the fierce improvisations of DKV Trio (with bassist Kent Kesler and percussionist Hamid Drake), the raucous avant-jazz/rock hybrids of The NRG Ensemble and Vandermark 5, and the post-Dolphy terrain covered by his quartet Steam. He is also more than capable of holding his own in the company of such icons of jazz and free music as Joe McPhee and Peter Brotzmann.

With his combination of youthful fire and good looks, Vandermark is a charismatic spearhead for a new kind of improv scene that is as likely to have grown up with Sonic Youth and the SST label as Evan Parker or Derek Bailey. Indeed, he takes every opportunity to push the music to new audiences. Poised between punk and free music, The NRG Ensemble and Vandermark 5 regularly play rock clubs without prompting a rush for the exits.

In person as in his music, Ken Vandermark is reserved and deferential one moment, animated and intense the next. Raised in Massachusetts, he moved from Boston to Chicago in 1989, since when he has become a fixture in the city’s music community.

“I think the situation in Chicago’s exceptional, based on all the musicians I’ve met and all the people I’ve talked to,” he muses. “I’m not aware of any place in the world where you’re able to play twice a week doing really creative stuff that’s not catering to a club’s economic expectations. I’m doing the music that I want to be doing, playing to people who are receptive to it, and I know it’s not like that in New York.”

Slouching back in the couch of his apartment’s sunny front room, Vandermark reflects on Chicago’s long musical narrative. Since the end of World War Two, its fertile soil has yielded tough tenor players like Johnny Griffin and Gene Ammons, the Chess Records label has kept the blues pumping through the city’s veins, further, it was the birthplace of Sun Ra’s Arkestra and the AACM. Thanks to the hard work of such artists and organizations, the city has become one of America’s rare improvisational hotbeds, capable of sustaining a semi-stable pool of venues and musicians, both local and international. German pianist Georg Graewe was so impressed with the city’s work ethic that he went to live there for half of 1997. While less confident musicians might be intimidated by the intensity of the Chicago scene, Vandermark embraces it as an opportunity for growth for himself and audiences alike.

“We work on these things,” he explains. “We have our own ideas that we think are interesting, and suddenly you have to contend with a group like [Swedish improvisational trio] Gush. Last year they played one of the most amazing improvised music sets I’ve ever seen, absolutely mindblowing. As a musician it’s pretty scary to see that, because the audience is sitting there saying, ‘Oh, so this is what the good stuff sounds like.’ And an audience that’s been coming out to see this stuff regularly, they’re getting an education. So now they know if you’re sucking — last night they saw Brotzmann tear the roof off, and now they are listening to you and going, ‘What do you have to show me?’”

Visibly excited, Vandermark adds, “When the musicians know the possibilities, and they know the audience knows, and everybody’s expectations are really high, it pushes the music in a beautiful way.”

Before arriving in Chicago and going at music full-time, Vandermark studied film and communications at McGill University in Montreal. He moved back to Boston in 1986 and began to focus all of his energy into music. The following year, he formed the trio Lombard Street with Debris drummer Curt Newton and guitarist Peter Warren. *All That Falls*, their self-produced cassette from 1989, is evidence that the raw

foundation for Vandermark's compositional style, governed by his distinctive rough and tumble aesthetic, was already in place by the time he arrived in Chicago at the end of the same year. But regular work eluded him until 1992. "It took a couple of years of very extreme frustration," he recalls, "but things have kind of picked up since then."

Vandermark's first important break in Chicago came, ironically, when he substituted for fellow reed player Mars Williams in Hal Russell's NRG Ensemble. Then, after Russell died in 1992, he was asked to sit in with the group at a memorial concert. The synergy within the group was so powerful that Vandermark became a regular member.

Since then, his unquenchable urge to play as much as possible has led to his participation in some two dozen recordings. However, the endlessly changing settings for his music began to wear on Vandermark's patience and he was forced to re-evaluate his strategy.

"This year I've tried to focus a little harder on specific projects, because last year it just got too much," he smiles wearily. "I was in about ten groups and from an organizational standpoint it was a nightmare, because I'm the guy who mostly does the phone calls and gets the gigs and that stuff. I felt I spread out too much — but there are way too many things that I like to do."

Which of his groups is his favorite?

"Ideally The Vandermark 5 is the closest I've come to having a group that can do all the kinds of things I like to do — at least musically. But it's very difficult because personalities and aptitudes and interests are all things that go into having a band. Some bands are better at doing certain kinds of things, and so if you want to do a wide variety of music, it's hard to come up with a band that can do them all. Anyway, a lot of pleasure comes out of working with different people in different contexts."

"One thing that people notice is that I play with [bassist] Kent Kessler in almost everything that I've done. Then there's other musicians like Tim Mulvenna [Steam's percussionist]. I play with him quite frequently in different groups, but one thing that happens — and a lot of people don't seem to notice this — if you take let's say, a pool of ten musicians, and you mix them in different combinations, the music that the resulting groups make is dramatically different, depending on the chemistry that happens."

Though Chicago is presently America's most welcoming city for musical innovation, the future of the music is nevertheless as uncertain here as elsewhere. Lunar Cabaret, the venue where Vandermark secured a weekly spot for over two years, has just ditched music as its programming. On the other hand, the Bop Shop, once a notoriously tough room for improvisors, has recently adopted a more adventurous booking policy, highlighted by the weekly spot they allow for the octet Vandermark co-leads with Graewe. Recalling what the Bop Shop used to be like, Vandermark shudders: "Invariably someone would start a pool game and all the pool balls would fall down in the middle of some quiet passage and destroy any ability to sustain a mood."

"Every year and a half I have to rethink where I'm going to work," he laments, "and that has nothing to do with music. All those things are business things trying to figure out how to do it and not lose your mind — on top of that, you're trying to compose and practise, you're trying to work on skills and ideas, rehearse, even though you don't even know where you're going to be playing."

At least the energy levels of Vandermark's projects gains them access to the city's rock clubs, where they play to audiences who have been primed by such radio stations as Northwestern University's WNUV for the improvisations of Evan Parker, Mats Gustafsson and their like. Does Vandermark see himself as a bridge between more adventurous rock music and improv?

"Not just the improvising scene, but music in general is in an incredibly strange place right now," he says by way of reply. "I think out of sheer boredom musically curious people are turning to other kinds of stuff for inspiration." About his own position in the scheme of things, he adds, "I think certain projects I do have a lot more visceral energy on the surface. Maybe there's an electric guitar, and maybe it's really driving, and there's regular rhythms that people can really latch onto. I don't sit back and say, 'Do you know what we need? We need a hook here!'"

At a push, Vandermark admits there's more to it than that. "The most successful thing I'm doing now on a lot of levels is the trio with Kent and Hamid Drake. Yet there are no tunes or electric guitar, and many times it gets extremely abstract. If someone will come out and see The Vandermark 5 and then catch the trio with Hamid, they'll come and check out our other things. There seems to be this thought that they won't get it, but you have to start somewhere."

Perseverance, his versatility and hard work more often attract negative criticism than praise. Some critics feel he is over-documented, or that his industrious nature somehow reflects a player with more style than substance. "I have an interest in trying to perform regularly, yet I get shit for that all the time. Or working with many other people, I get shit for that too," Vandermark sighs, somewhat exasperated. "I look at people like Coleman Hawkins. Who did he play with? If you look at his recordings he's hopping from project to project, featuring different people in different contexts, and tell me that didn't have an impact on his playing. Tell me the be-boppers didn't have an impact on his playing. He was one of the first people to play with [Dizzy] Gillespie and [Howard] McGhee and those guys. His ears were so open, and it had a huge impact on his playing. The guy went from playing with Louis Armstrong for a short period to playing with Thelonious Monk. Who do we have like that? We're talking huge stylistic jumps."

Into our third pot of coffee, Vandermark is now on a roll. "And that stuff he did with [Sonny] Rollins," he rolls his eyes, "that late stuff with Rollins is so out, it's amazing the shit that he did. And that's one example I ascribe to be like that. It comes down to performing and working with different people, experimenting and

taking chances. The problem is, if you get a gig once a month at best, how many different things are you going to get to attempt?"

"I think that it is negative when people perceive this as competition over a limited amount of work, as opposed to various people being involved in the same field, trying to develop the field, and take it some place. If nothing else, they can add their own individual personality to the possibilities. That's what is amazing about a guy like Anthony Braxton. He is so unbelievably open to stuff."

Defiantly, he continues: "So these are my methods. I like to work with different people. I think there's ample evidence that it is a legitimate way to approach things. If you want to perform less, fine. I'm not getting on a soapbox and saying your methods are wrong. It gets discouraging and frustrating when people take me to task about it, claiming that my motivations are non-musical, that I want to be famous, or that I want to be in with the hip crowd, or that I don't know what I'm doing. If you don't like the music I'm doing, that is valid, but I don't criticize my motivations if you don't know what they are."

"I am an incredibly privileged person right now," he reflects, "and I'm aware of it. What I'm doing now is what I've wanted to do for years. I know how lucky I am, and it's kind of unfortunate that people criticize this thing as though I am on the route to fucking selling platinum records! It's absurd." NRG Ensemble's Bejazzed Gets A Facelift: The Vandermark 5's Target Car Flag are out now on *Aztec* (through SACD). Vandermark features on *PRPee/Vandermark/Kessler's A Meeting In Chicago* (Otha Disk, through Harmonia Mundi).



The Vandermark 5 look to the future

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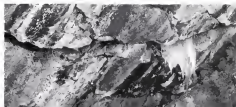
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# invisible jukebox

## Spiritualized

Tested by Mike Barnes

Jason Pierce made his first serious music as a teenager when he formed Spacemen 3 with Pete 'Sonic Boom' Kember in Rugby in 1982. Influenced by The Cramps, The Stooges and MC5, they produced a druggy, guitar-heavy form of drone rock, which became the blueprint for a new kind of feedback-drenched British dreampop. Their debut album *Sound Of Confusion* was released in 1986, followed by *The Perfect Prescription*, *Performance*, *Playing With Fire* and *Recurring*. After his acrimonious split with Kember in 1991, Pierce went on to form Spiritualized. Their first release was the 12 minute single "Feel So Sad", which found Pierce expanding his sonic template beyond Spacemen 3's original guitar drones. Their debut album *Lazer Guided Melodies* (1992) consisted of finely wrought electric systems music, interwoven with strings and horns. It was followed by *Pure Phase* (1995) and *Ladies And Gentlemen We Are Floating In Space* (1997). The latter is an ambitious experiment featuring six wind players, a gospel choir, The Balanescu Quartet, slide guitarist BJ Cole and Dr. John on piano. Its critical and commercial success won the group the freedom to undertake some unusual projects, including a gig at 'The Highest Show On Earth' at the top of Toronto's CN Tower, 1200 feet above sea level and a La Monte Young Benefit concert in London, where they were accompanied by a 30 piece orchestra. Meanwhile, in August, a collaboration between Pierce and composer Steve Hartland will be premiered at the Edinburgh Festival. The Jukebox took place in Pierce's London hotel room.

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## SUICIDE

"Mr Ray" from *22/7/96*  
— *Reinventing America*  
EP (Black First)

Sounds like a Suicide gig, something about the drum machine and the audience talking. Every Suicide show

starts the same, even before Alex Veiga begins to shout. It's an EP of their 15 minute appearance at the Barbican earlier this year.

They joined us onstage at the Astoria (in January). It was the NME Brit Awards thing, and I didn't want it to turn into a kind of self-congratulatory thing, so we invited Suicide along to put more of the emphasis on them. Their first album had just been re-released and it seemed a good way of putting them onstage so people could find out a bit more of what they were about.

They were very intense. We did "Rocket USA". I wanted to do mellotron with Martin Rev on "Take Your Time" (from *Lazer Guided Melodies*), but it was a bit uncomfortable only asking Martin Rev to get involved, as the two of them were travelling together and stuff. So we ended up doing a Suicide cover, which wasn't the original plan, but it came out so full of energy at the end of our show, it was amazing. We asked Martin Rev a while back to play on the first Spiritualized album, but again that didn't happen. I've always been into his stuff. He's seriously talented.

Were Suicide a direct influence? The track "Suicide" on *Spacemen 3's* *Playing With Fire* seemed like a homage of sorts.

They had a massive impact on *Spacemen 3*. We did "Suicide" as a reference to what they were doing. Originally Alan Vega was going to sing on it, but we could never see the studio time down to when he was around. It came close a couple of times, but we never got that together, so it became an instrumental, dedicated to the two of them.

## THE BALANESCU QUARTET

"Autobahn" from *Possessed (Plate)*

[Immediately] Alexander Balanescu. He's a genius. I think their Kraftwerk covers work really well.

This and their version of "The Models" I think are great. Alex has got an instrumental voice that very few people have — like Miles Davis's trumpet, a recognisable as Miles Davis, Jim Hendrix's guitar, probably Martin Rev's keyboard patterns and drum machine. That's apparent on all the Michael Nyman recordings — his voice on violin makes those records sound like they do.

I really like this record. That's part of the reason I got in touch to work with them. Obviously I thought the Nyman stuff shared common ground with what we were doing. Then I found out that he was doing stuff around Kraftwerk. The Balanescu Quartet played on the second Spiritualized album [Pure Phase]. Although we've never made them available, they actually did string quartet versions of every song on that album in a similar way to this.

The Balanescu Quartet also play on *Ladies And*

Gentlemen. How do you arrange their parts?

Sing parts. I guess I do some of the arrangements with Alex, but a lot with Clare Connors. I can sing cello lines. I can't really score for instruments in that way, for a string quartet or bigger. I don't know whether I can't do it — it's more that I've never attempted to write out a whole 90 bar score for string parts.

Was the piece you did for the La Monte Young benefit concert an orchestral improvisation?

Yeah. It was more like I did one with "No God Only Religion" [from *Ladies And Gentlemen*]. I'd written that as sheet music. Actually it sounds incredibly improvised, it's actually written down. But I found out it was difficult to get classically trained people to improvise. If you wrote them an 'improvised' piece they could play it, but to actually just say 'play something off the top of your head', they were unable to do it.

I wrote five rules that enabled people to find a way of improvising. You had to play an ascending scale of G or in any given key. You could choose when to play the scale, how long to play the scale, and how many octaves to cover and what time frame to play it in, and you could change the time frame at any given time. Everybody starts playing the same regimented time frame and gradually, after one person realises you can play triplets against it, more people get ideas. It builds in a weird way so in the middle, people were playing very odd rhythms and towards the end it levelled out again. I was really happy with the way it worked.

There's a Stockhausen line about free jazz, when he says that just by attaching the word free next to jazz means that it's no longer free, except within the confines of jazz. This is working in the same way, letting people have some kind of freedom, but giving them a line that they can't cross.



## JOHN COLTRANE

"Ascension — Edition 1" from *Ascension (Impulse)*

Sounds like our La Monte Young thing [laughs]. No it's not. It's great. What year is it? 1965.

It's not *The Arkestra*? All

this kind of stuff came to my attention through The Stooges' "LA Blues" or MCS's version of "Starship" and all that stuff. [Lengthy pause] I don't know this record.

It's *John Coltrane's Ascension*. It's more obviously his record when he cuts loose later.

People have put some John Coltrane on tapes for me, but I can't say that I've ever been a big fan. The weird thing about a lot of that kind of music is that I buy stuff you're meant to like, like *Giant Steps* or [Miles Davis's] *A Silent Way* — everybody's meant to like that but I didn't really get it. I have *A Love Supreme* but I never play it. This sounds great though.

So you like this kind of free jazz?

[Looks at CD cover] I was going to say Pharoah Sanders, but he's on this anyway. Yeah, I like it, but going back to the Stockhausen thing, sometimes I think it's free because it can be, and it just ends up like a lot

of noodling. That's been my problem with a lot of John Coltrane stuff. It just goes on and on. What I like is the big orchestrated arrangements, like Gil Evans's work with Miles Davis, where there's some purpose to it. It's a hard thing to talk about and fortunately I don't have to talk about music in that way.

Were you trying to evoke a similar free blowing mood on

"The Individual" on *Ladies And Gentlemen*?

The track was named after [former Glastonbury member] Terry Edwards. He plays all the saxophones on that. He's "The Individual" tattooed down his neck. So it's linked to him. People thought it was about being an individual within the planet or something [laughs].

## BIG STAR

"Holocaust" from *Third/Sister Lovers* (Rykodisc)

Jim Dickinson [the album's producer] is Dick's third album? When I did some stuff with Jim Dickinson for our last record, he was talking about this record and the track and how Alex Chilton wanted it to be just his vocal and piano. Jim put all these guitar tracks and backing to it, which have become so much part of the track, but at the time they argued about it. So much Alex didn't want that kind of sound. Part of what makes this track for me is all the weird guitar work. "Big Black Car" is similar to this — it's got the same kind of sounds behind it. Again, it wasn't Alex Chilton's original idea of how it should turn out.

It would sound even bleaker with just piano and voice.

It would sound like Neil Young. When he was playing live recently he was doing a piece with an old foot operated pump organ, harmonica and his voice. It was beautiful, they're all really fragile sounds. When he plays harmonica he plays these really great notes, though he can barely find enough air to pull through the harmonica.

Were Big Star and Alex Chilton an influence on your writing?

Not really. Again I was never really a massive fan. The first time I heard about Alex Chilton was when he played guitar on Tav Falco's first album, so I wanted to check out what he did after that. I grew to know and like Big Star, but it was always the connection with Jim Dickinson and The Cramps and that kind of thing. Probably my favourite Chilton album is *High Priest*. I really love that. I don't dislike [Big Star] but I can't say they've had a huge influence on our music. They're probably there somewhere — not as much as Tav Falco, but then the link isn't so obvious.

What other Jim Dickinson stuff do you like?

I love his solo album *Don't Feed*. It came out in 1971 on Atlantic. It's amazing. He did a cover of the Furry Lewis song "Casey Jones On The Road Again" and Dylan's "John Brown". They're phenomenal recordings. And he's got a band of late, Mud Boy And The Neutrons, they've put out great albums. He also did a track with The Cramps. Why I know him is because he documented a lot of Memphis music, people like Furry Lewis, recording him in his home. He sang the song "Cadillac Man". I can't remember the name of the band, but he's got the honour of being on the last record issued on Sun Records.



**JOHNNY COPELAND**  
**"Down On Bending Knees" from *Down And Out* — *The Sad Soul Of The Black South* (Trikont)**  
 Sounds like a cross between Solomon Burke

and James Brown

**It's Johnny Copeland. He came from Louisiana originally, but recorded this in Houston, Texas.**  
 I haven't heard of Johnny Copeland. It's a weird thing about Texas music. Apart from Austin, Houston's got a massive musical heritage and in Dallas they don't seem to talk about their musical heritage in the same way. It seems like nothing came out of Dallas. I think that's why Jim Dickinson is important in Memphis, because he's always documenting stuff. A lot of people know a lot more about Memphis music than they ever will about Dallas music.

[Looks at CD cover] I love OV Wright's voice. Bobby Blue Bland got a voice like a saxophone. I know Percy Mayfield and Ella Washington from this record, the rest of it's regional. Johnny Copeland and George Perkins. And The Silver Stars, for example. I love it. A lot of it is church derived, isn't it? Gospel music got this amazing fervor. This has the same fervor and excitement but without the same message. I like gospel music but I don't have faith in the lyric. The religious viewpoint.

**What prompted you to use the gospel choir live and on *Ladies And Gentlemen*?**

We started one of the shows with "Oh Happy Day" [originally a hit for The Edwin Hawkins Singers] and then ended with a full-on gospel version of that song. We ran the last five songs with gospel choir. Why did we do it? I think because we were able to do it. I guess one benefit of having more press and more people knowing about what we're doing is that those ideas don't just fall on deaf ears, they're not stopped by how much we can afford. I've always been very ambitious live and wanted to attempt things when we don't know what the outcome's going to be.

I don't like music that's made from blueprints, and the idea with this record was not to use a Spiritualized blueprint either. But the idea of getting a big session like that together is actually a normal formal arrangement in pop music. The Southern soul music is horn section, string section, backing voices. It's on everything — doo-wop, Stax and Hi. Elvis in Memphis, Captain Beefheart, Sly Stone, Phil Spector. It's not like we're using bass trombones against glockenspiels or any kind of instruments that don't sit together well. We're actually using stuff which has been tried and tested, but with a view to taking that instrumentation somewhere it hasn't been before.

## FUNKADELIC

**"Free Your Mind And Your Ass Will Follow (Instrumental)" from *Live* — *Pleadowbrook, Rochester, Michigan* (Westbound)**  
 [George Clinton's closing speech mentions Funkadelic]

**That's given it away.**

What live record is this from?

**It was recorded in Michigan in 1971, but only released a couple of years ago. Apparently when George Clinton moved to Detroit in the late 60s, he fell under MC5's influence, as this track shows.**

It sounded like that, it didn't sound like Funkadelic. When that started, it could have been The Velvet Underground, anything from that through to MC5 when the guitar comes in. I thought it might have been Frank Zappa at one time.

**I know you're a fan of Sly Stone. What about Funkadelic?**

I think more so, of late. I had a real problem with rhythm in music. None of our music starts with rhythm, it starts with melody. I had a problem with bands like Funkadelic, Can, a lot of jazz — anything that was predominantly based around rhythm. I've only really come to that of late. Can have never influenced what we've done, because in their music everything starts with the drums and works off of that it wasn't something I got into when I was younger.

**On all your recordings the drums have been mixed low.**  
 In Spiritualized stuff, there's no anchor to it. That was the whole idea — to make music that had no beat to it, no way that you could just tap your foot to find familiarity within that time. Even in Spacemen 3, the drums were mixed incredibly low, so they were no more a focus than anything else.

Alexander Balanescu pointed out that a lot of our music is in weird time signatures. I don't start off writing, like, 4/4, or with a beat. I write from the melody down. Say "Cool Waves" — the first four bars are something like 9/4, 5/4, 3/4, 7/4, there are four time signature changes. And it's not because I'm trying to be clever. That's just how it works out if you sing the melody line first and write the music out later. I don't know how hard it would be to make music like that if you were aware of what you were doing.



## BEDOUIIN ASCENT

**"Cat Can Blow" from *Avantgardium* — *Drum 'N' Bass* (Rising High)**

**I don't know this record at all. It's Bedouin Ascent. It's off a drum 'n' bass compilation called *Avantgardium*.**

The weird thing about drum 'n' bass is that I listen to most of it when I'm out, and often mixed by DJs, which I think gives you a different perspective. I first heard drum 'n' bass in this sort of context and didn't get it at all. But then when you hear it out and hear the bottom end of it you realise that the line you follow. Obviously on something like this [the portable CD player] we are using to play back the jukebox selections you hear predominantly the top end. It's like listening to a Jamaican sound system recording on a hi-fi in your room. It doesn't really make sense.

**Your guitarist John Coxon produces drum 'n' bass tracks in Spring Heel Jack. Have you ever been tempted?**  
 It would make sense to do it. It's like learning the

formula, some way of making it work and then doing the music. I think our album is influenced by stuff like that, most apparent on tracks like "No God Only Religion", but more for the energy of it than copying the rhythm and the formula. Spring Heel Jack make music similar to how we make music, in the way they listen to a lot and don't want to redo ideas that they know have been done. They're not in competition with other people making drum 'n' bass.

## CHARLEMAGNE PALESTINE

**"Two Fifties" from *Four Manifestations On Six Elements* (Baroon)**  
 [An organ drone starts.] Is it going to change at all? Not much.

**Is it La Monte Young or Cage or something?**

**It's Charlemagne Palestine. This was recorded in 1973-74. Do you know his stuff?**

No.

**He did a performance recently where he created a huge drone piece on a full size pipe organ by gradually jamming the keys down.**

Part of the reason we did the La Monte Young thing was he set up a tone in his apartment in New York and it doesn't change at all. I've been there a couple of times. It's been running for a good few years now and it's set up to run until the year 2000. It's a single chord, set up with microtones. The interesting thing about that is the way you move your head around the room changes the way you hear the tones. The La Monte Young drone is weird in that there's nothing musically going on, there's nothing within the drone that changes, yet your perception of it changes radically by just walking across the room.

**What's it like to live in that environment?**

I don't know what it's like for him. We can come and go as we please. One person stays in there most of the time and looks after the place. He listens to this thing daily. He says it's quite relaxing. He didn't seem affected in any way [laughs].

**You've done some drone pieces with Spacemen 3 and Spiritualized.**

Yeah, "Ecstasy Symphony" [from Spacemen 3's *Transparencies*] came about by taping keys down and realising that once you set up those kind of resonances you get something that's more interesting to listen to than you'd imagine. That track basically is an experiment, putting the same tone through different effects in the studio. We ran a tone through a stereo echo to start with, then through a phaser, then through all the basic effects available in the studio, then we mixed it across a 16 track board. It ended up sounding like chors and string sections.

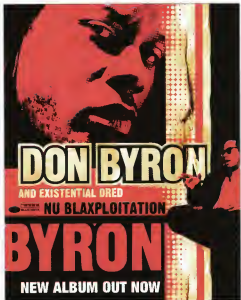
That's what I found most interesting about the first Spiritualized album. The input is minimal but you get overtones that make it sound more than it is. A lot of stuff audible on that record wasn't played, it just comes from the way you can record sound together that then create other harmonies. I could hear backing vocals that definitely weren't there, which came out of what was played. [ ] Spiritualized play John Peel's *Meltown* this month. See *Soundings* for details.



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# i was a teenage

... and everyone else was a jerk, in the gospel struggle to reverse the laws of negativity in music

**“**I’ve always been interested in the extremes,” rasps Lydia Lunch. “It’s real life experience, it’s people that have uncontrollable desires to over-stimulate themselves, that want the epitome of every experience, that want to taste life fully. It’s not death obsessed, it’s life obsessed, and I think that’s what people have continually misunderstood.”

Lydia leaps up from the seat she’s been perched on for the best part of an hour, legs and feet dangling, still try in high heels, a mass of copper hair framing her perfectly oval face and bright red lips. We’re riding the tiniest toytrain train through central Switzerland. “Where the fuck are we?” she hollers at a bunch of startled backpackers, who stare back at us as if in fear of their lives, too dumbstruck to respond. “I mean, do they ever bother putting any fuckin’ signs up? Hey! Is this Chaux de Fonds? Where are we?” She drops back into her seat.

“I think we get there at 26 minutes past,” she murmurs, checking her watch before storming back into her theme. “Uh, so even though my lyrics and my experiences often seem death obsessed, it’s really life-in-the-extreme obsessed,” she emphasizes. “It’s always about, feeling as alive as possible, to in a sense deny death by taunting it. That’s what so many of my personal experiences have been about, that’s the the goal of them



# jesus

according to **Lydia Lunch**. But in the 20 years since No Wave imploded she has voiced her underground film, spoken word and more. Words: David Keenan. Photography: Adam Lawrence

"I want to feel every cell in my body crying, screaming, howling with fucking life because I know too well what it's like to be numb or to be without feeling, to feel bitter or angry, to be dissatisfied, to be frustrated. I wanna feel deliciously alive. Of course now I'm more satisfied, I'm like, 'Oh, I've done both extremes, now I can just relax.' I'm calm for Miss Lunch, but I still have too much energy."

I've been in the company of Miss Lunch for 24 hours now and I feel anything but calm. We met the day before in Berne, on the European leg of her *Mutakambanza* tour, where she promised me that a few hours in her company would "psychically heal" me. I can't say I actually feel any better, but perhaps I'm a little closer to understanding the will that has driven Lydia to repeatedly bang her head against the forces of daily attrition in her on-going exploration and exorcism of suffering. As a self-confessed "confrontationalist," her art strategies have been diffuse, to say the least. In the last 20 years, she has moved from vaguely rock-related projects — most notably, *Teenage Jesus And The Jerks*, *Beirut Slump*, *8 Eyed Spy* and *Harry Crews* — through solo instrumental recordings and scabrous spoken word performance to books, comics, photography, sculpture. Whatever the medium, she has gnawed at

the same obsessions that drove her out of upstate Rochester and down to New York City when she was just 16. A persistent presence on the avant garde/post-punk fringe ever since, be it through her own out-there projects or through her collaborations with the likes of Sonic Youth, Foetus and Rowland S Howard, Lydia has defined a whole new paradigm for female outsider art. More exemplary than directly influential, her output has cowed many (usually) male extreme art pretenders, just as it has empowered any number of women to tackle their misery head on. If some women have mistaken this empowerment to launch careers as fire-breathing wrens out of leftfield (Courtney Love's Hole for one), Lydia's true impact is harder to quantify. She's never received mainstream recognition in the same way as, say, her former spoken word sparring partner Henry Rollins, but then she has never sought its approval. Media-friendly she is not.

Having said that, her new "illustrated word" double CD *Mutakambanza* (literally, The Mother Of All Sounds, the original OM), is her most concise and successful fusion of text and music. Soundscaped by Joseph Buderholzer — aka Backworld, an old associate of NYC scuzz film maker Richard Kern and a former Foetus group member — its non-styled spooky electronics provide the perfect settings for Lydia's extended

ruminations on love as an affliction and the comfort of nihilism. Written under the influence of Barbara Sjö, whose study of the matriarchy, *The Great Mother Earth*, reverberates throughout *Matrikamentra*, and EM Coran (about whom more below), it is, perversely, Lydia's most appealingly musical set since 1980's *Queen Of Sorrow*. Her trademark harsh, howling vocals have dropped a tone and her now seductive, whispered incantations take on a newfound musicality embedded in Budenzholzer's empathetic soundscapes. While not exactly easy to swallow — Lydia never is — it illuminates new dark paths, ripe for further exploration.

In Berné the previous night, Lydia and Joseph, joined for the tour by saxophonist Terry Edwards, had raised the roof of the Reitschule, a huge, communally run art space set up in a stable squatted more than a decade ago. Budenzholzer's electronics filled the room with a nocturnal hum while Edwards coaxed subtle feedback from the bell of his horn, lighting the smokier passages with Sonny Rollins-like flashes and sleazy honks. Lydia prowled the stage, leaning straight into the faces of the crowd, demanding their attention. "I want all my witches to step forward," she ordered, prompting a motley crew of enraptured females to rush the front of the stage. Kissing their heads, Lydia began intoning, "Use your bodies, love your bodies" until, distracted by some dumb punker giving her the wink, she barked, "Use *his* body!"

With a train to catch the next morning, Lydia's long been up and waiting by the time I stumble down to the hotel lobby in a state, still wiping sleep from my eyes and shaking like a bum as I light my first cigarette. "For God's sake boy, wake up!" she chastises. "Sleep when you're dead." For her part, Lydia has been up since nine taking photographs of a girl she met the night before, in the garden at the back of the hotel. The rest of the entourage had already left in the van for tonight's concert in the post-and-perfect mountain town, Chaux de Fonds. Some hours later, Lydia and I finally light out for Heidi territory on the next train.

No sooner are the wheels turning and tape rolling than Lydia's off, rattling through herstory, rolling words around her tongue, playing with language like Sun Ra. Her reputation is formidable, to say the least, but she's nothing like I feared. She's friendly, fun even, totally approachable, and no subject is off-limits. Indeed, she has the Zen-like aura of someone who is finally at peace with herself. But in situations centered on her universe, such as this interview, the sheer force of her personality makes her the centre of the carnage's attention. Still reeling from her whirlwind presence, the backpackers are murmuring that Heidi was never like this.

As our toytrain train makes its tortuous ascent into the mountains, Lydia Lunch is descending into the inferno of memory, dredging for details of a far from idyllic childhood. She grew up in Rochester, a mid-sized and mildly schizophrenic town in upstate New York. Its white collar suburbs and greenery are interspersed with gang-infested ghettos. And a big biker scene further disturbs the peace.

"I had a lot of fun there," grins Lydia, "gang-banging boyfriends. I hung out with the Hell's Angels when I was 12. They were friends of the woman I babysat for, and she dragged me along. That connection saved me a few times. So it's not as if I didn't know extremely before I came to New York. I knew what was up. I got into a lot of trouble so I figured I better go somewhere I could blend in better."

Dropping out of school on the urging of her English teacher, she gravitated towards New York City when she was 16. Though she was partly moving to escape her increasingly abusive father, her parents were horrible.

Throughout her career Lydia's writing has examined her complex relationship with her father. Even now her feelings towards him remain ambiguous. "Daddy Dearest", from her first spoken word cassette, *The Uncensored Lydia Lunch* (1985, collected on the 3xCD spoken word set *Comes Against Nature*), is an open letter to her father, which confronts him with the repercussions of his abuse. "He never saw 'Daddy Dearest'," remarks Lydia. "I tried to confront him once about all he instilled in me and what he made me, but all he could say was, 'I know.' It was the most disappointing confrontation."

"My parents knew some of my material but he's the only one that truly got me. He thought I was a comedian from the word go. Really, I have to thank him because I've learned from his mistakes and benefited from his rebellious nature. I understand his obsessions because I share them. But I control them. I look at myself and I'm his fuckin' spitting image." She describes her father as a radical and a rebel — constantly

changing jobs, hustling pool, a card shark, driven out of a few towns. Like his daughter would do later, he also ran away from home, in his case when he was 14. "He was all the things I looked for in the men I stalked," Lydia says. "But I took his rebellious qualities and refined them. So I have to thank him—for my gypsy spirit, for bucking the system, for being a con artist. I'm glad my parents are dead, though. I always felt like an orphan."

Suddenly the resounding roar of the train hitting a deep tunnel with the mountains masks Lydia's recall. "Can you hear me over that rumble?" she yells, noting we've already cleared the carriage.

If Lydia truly "always felt like an orphan," then the bloodied subject matter of her first single was set in the stars. Released on the appropriately named Migrant label in 1976, "Orphans" marked the debut of her first group Teenage Jesus And The Jerks. Her impossibly shrill and overdriven slide guitar, coupled with hammered down strokes and the single drum crack of Bradley "The Beast" Field, combines with the urgency of her voice and heartbreak lyric to create an extreme, yet extremely moving document of sonic nihilism. Lydia is one of the great female guitarists. Though she lacked even the most rudimentary instrumental know-how, her intuitive fret-grinding slide work raised a noise which the late rock critic Lester Bangs likened to the sound of a cat, tied to the bumper of two cars, being slowly stretched and torn apart.

"Teenage Jesus were anti-fucking everything," asserts Lydia, rolling her eyes through a litany of CBGB regulars: "Richard Hell, Patti Smith, The Ramones, although they inspired me and influenced me to go to New York in the first place. I knew they were too traditional and had to be rebelled against. All the No Wave bands, well, what I thought of as the main bands—Mars, DNA, Teenage Jesus, Contortions—all rehearsed in the loft where I lived. We were kind of a small cult, but what we all shared was a similar intensity. I mean, taking those four examples alone, the music was so incredibly diverse. Other groups existed at the time but failed to make it onto the No New York album, which people have blamed me for. They said I was exclusionary. Well, I am."

The milestone No New York compilation was assembled by Brian Eno in 1978 in an attempt to articulate a scene already imploding in on itself. From the beginning No Wave was conceived as refusal. Noting the punk rush for overground acceptance, Mars (featuring Sumner Crane, Mark Cunningham and Connie Burg), DNA (Arto Lindsay and Ilse Mori), James Chance's Contortions and Lydia's Teenage Jesus (also briefly featuring Chance on bass) served up howling slabs of pure atonal rage, defying the music industry to make a trend of their denial. "I saw Mars before Teenage Jesus existed," recalls Lydia gleefully. "I was very encouraged. They were so dissonant, so obviously insane, making no concession or compromise to anything that had existed previously. They were truly creating from their own torture. Beautiful."

Concurrent with Teenage Jesus, Lydia also played guitar for the blackest of NYC sludge rockers, Berrut Slump. After they both imploded, she assayed the swamp mama howl of B Eyed Spy, probably best remembered for their covers of "Daddy War Daddy" and Creedence Clearwater Revival's "Run Through The Jungle."

"Berrut Slump was very much the rebellion against Teenage Jesus," Lydia explains

"In turn B Eyed Spy was the rebellion against that. In the beginning, all my records revolved against the previous ones. After I rebelled against myself so much, I decided to embrace myself and follow some set pattern." Her low rock boredom threshold means she never stays in one place long enough for anyone to pigeonhole her. Indeed, it's not easy to get a grip on Lydia Lunch. "Why the fuck should it be?" she growls. "It's not easy being Lydia Lunch."

Lydia ended this period of convulsive reaction in 1980 with the psychotic cabaret album *Queen Of Siam*. An unlikely combination of orchestrated cartoon soundtracks and twisted nursery rhymes, coupled with smoky burlesque and big band stylings, it was, draws Lydia, "a whole new kind of torture." Until Matkoimmona, it was her most approachable record. But Lydia's soft focus vocals delivered any unsuspecting listener seduced by her little girl vocalising onto stiletto-sharp lyrics, whose cuts revealed hitherto unexplored hurts.

"I had done the harsh music," she groans. "I wanted to do something that was a slighter torture, a different flavour, regressive relief. Some of those early songs on *Queen Of Siam* were partly based on my own musical ignorance. It's all I knew how to write, and part of it was getting in touch with the dead baby, the murder of my innocence. But the songs are hardly innocent—they're just sung in a little girl voice—I was never innocent."

Lydia takes a fast drag on her cigarette, stands up and looks it out the train window, as we attempt to piece together some kind of chronology. Emotionally and physically, she's all over the map. Tracing her footsteps is a difficult process. Projects and collaborators occasionally overlap, but once finished, she's gone—a new country, possibly a new soulmate, but always the same obsessions haunting her trail, forcing her to endlessly reconfigure the rigorous interrogations of her self that form the basis of her output, each time causing her to search out the modes most suited to its expression, be it music, word, photography or sculpture. "The always had a rather gypsy nature," she says, "but there's so many atmospheres to be experienced. When people live in one place too long, I think they become either too comfortable or they forget that they're just a cog in the wheel. It's the city as a vortex, as a vampire, no city needs you but you need it. You become part of the electricity of a place and I think

that as a writer you need different atmospheres, different frames of reference, different landscapes."

Having exhausted New York, Lydia left America for Berlin. After meeting The Birthday Party, she stalked guitarist Rowland S Howard



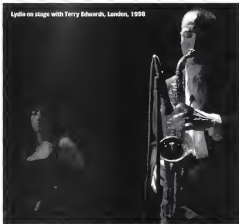
**"Only men heckle, especially when you're insulting the very essence of their being and the way they've continued to destroy the planet"**

to London. Over the next 15 years, Howard's wasted vocal slur and blues-bruised guitar would intermittently serve as the perfect foil for Lydia's forays into skewed rock. Nothing catches the essence of their working relationship better than their predatory take on Nancy Sinatra and Lee Hazlewood's "Some Velvet Morning," recorded in 1982, which pitches Howard's drunken leer against Lydia's little temptress swagger. But *Shotgun Wedding* (1991) captures them at their peak. Dark black spirituals and downer blues fight for air amid Howard's extended skease riffing, best showcased by the hypnotic spiral of "Endless Fall" and their aspired take on the blues standard "In My Time Of Dying."

However, 1982 was a bad time to be around The Birthday Party. Completely strung out, they were primed to self-destruct. Rowland and Lydia swiftly found themselves ostracised by the others. "Basically, they did too many drugs and I didn't," Lydia

deadpan. "Nick Cave, who I completely respect as one of the finest lyricists rock music has ever known, never understood me at all — either as a woman, as an artist or as an individual. He never got me. It's simple: you either get me, you accept me or you do not get me, and he never got me. I don't know if the dividing line was the pleasure principle. I was really into gustatory and pleasure but not artificial stimulants. I was busy exploring adrenal over-stimulation." Like what? I interject. "I mean sex," she apologizes, "excuse me, let me be more specific. Just natural endorphin highs and rushes, really getting, at that point, into exploring other altered states. It has to do with energy transfers, be it sexual or otherwise, be it just a deep conversation that transports you to another place — it's varamism." Is it a mutual exchange? What does she give in return? "Enough to make you sick. I gave them encouragement, energy, power, healing, light, love, what more do you want?"

Though Lydia Lunch recorded with various members of The Birthday Party, eventually producing the album *Honeymoon in Red*, their rapidly souring relations delayed its release until the mid-80s. Undaunted, Lydia moved back across the Atlantic to Los Angeles in late 82, where she recorded what many consider her finest work, the monstrous, chugging *13 13*. Lydia agrees: "I still think it's one of my best albums —



Lydia on stage with Terry Edwards, London, 1990

beautiful songs and beautiful musicianship. The sound of that was really dictated by LA. It was the time of the Night Stalker, who'd murdered someone a few blocks away from my house. A very paranoid album. I was in a chronic state of paranoia at the time, waiting for the Night Stalker. He never did come a-knocking. The album was influenced a lot by where I was emotionally and physically at the time."

Returning to London, Lydia's landscape was significantly altered when she met Jim Thirlwell, aka Foetus, after being impressed by a press release he had written for The Birthday Party. The pair not only became lovers, but Thirlwell also became Lydia's most important collaborator and energy source for the next seven years. "I appreciated Jim because he was so in touch with his feminine side," eulogises Lydia, "and since I'm so in touch with my masculine side, it was a beautiful commingling. I love sensitive, well-integrated men. The only men I've ever had problems with are the men that are most intimidated by my masculinity and most insecure about their own. We were just so opposite. I'm narcissistic and vain, confident in the extreme, and he's quite ravagingly the opposite. So my goal with him was to bring him out of his shell. On stage and in his music it's complete exhibitionism, but as a human being he's very quiet. He's shy, he's sensitive and I was hoping I could rub off on him in that way. But 14 years later it doesn't appear as if I have," she lets out a self-deprecating snigger, "which is part of his charm and beauty, of course."

Their first and loudest collaboration was *Sharkfist*, which was initially conceived as a bid to get a support date with Einstürzende Neubauten. When the engagement didn't happen, they decided to record the piece anyway. "Son Of Stink" is an intensely overloaded celebration of city carnality and desires over vacillating gasps and a pounding metal percussion track. Its CD issue also features "The Crumb", recorded with Sonic Youth's Thurston Moore, which Lydia describes as, "One of the most extreme recordings I've ever been part of. Hear the wall of sound Thirlwell created — absolutely stunningly beautiful and unimaginably atrocious."

If Lydia Lunch seems drawn to self-destructive figures, she never loses control of herself, even as she is impelled by their negative energy. Steady in the eye of the hurricane? "Nature of the beast — nature of my beast," she draws, stretching her legs across the aisle. "I'm drawn to extremists, anyone who is tortured by their passion, their obsession, their frustration. Because they're not intimidated by passion. Unlike most people, who are horrified of passion. I have a lot of self-control but those that are out of control do not intimidate me. As a matter of fact I'm drawn to it, perhaps, as my diametric opposite."

"The reason I'm drawn to any collaborator," she elaborates, "is because I know that when the combined energies and visions intermingle there's going to be something created that might not have existed otherwise. If genius equals torture, that's the price you pay. If genius equals self-destruction, which it doesn't have to in every case, that's the price they pay."

Was she out to "save" such men? Emphatically shaking her head, she cuts me dead. "I never thought I was going to save another artist, but I think one of my greatest gifts to anyone is that I'm the grand encourager, I'm the cattle prod. I have so much energy, I just have to, I'm forced to, I want to encourage other people to take another step, to go into another direction, to do something else. That's my greatest gift to anyone, whether they're a musician or a human being."

By 1984 Lydia Lunch was back in New York. Her return coincided with the rise of a new breed of hardcore groups empowered by No Wave refusal, most notably Smears and Sonic Youth, even as they reconciled its anti-rock rhetoric with a Stooge-rock aesthetic. Regardless, Lydia still enthuses over Sonic Youth. "I think that Sonic Youth are one of the most amazing live spectacles that exist," she asserts. "No one does a wall of guitar-tornadoes like they do. And they were definitely inspired by Teenage Jesus and that whole period. Thurston [Moore] was in a band at the same time as Teenage Jesus. The Coathorns, but I think it took until Sonic Youth for them to find their footing." Acknowledging their roots in No Wave, Sonic Youth collaborated with Lydia on the murderously explosive single "Death Valley '69", where Thurston and Lydia wail their tale of Manson inspired evil. "Thurston and I wrote it in ten minutes," laughs Lydia, "on a bus on the way up to Spanish Harlem, where I was living at the time."

In 1985 Lydia renewed her acquaintance with Mars musician Connie Burg, aka Lucy Hamilton, to record *The Drowning Of Lucy Hamilton*, an instrumental album that partly formed the soundtrack for *Right Side Of My Brain* — one of the two notorious psychosexual movies Lydia wrote and starred in for seascore director Richard Kern. Describing the music as a post-Bertram-Henry-Manson tribute, Lydia says the idea was to make the sparest instrumental album ever.

As the 80s wore out, Lydia Lunch gravitated more and more towards the written and spoken word, recording next to no new music for going on five years. More than any musician, Lydia's inspirations were coming from literature, her tastes running from Harry Crews through Jean Genet, Marcus De Sade, Georges Bataille, Henry Miller, Michel Foucault and Gilles Deleuze. Perversely, the Florida writer Harry Crews — in the abstract rather than the flesh — can claim responsibility for Lydia's gradual return to the rock stage. His novels, such as *The Gospel Singer* and *The Knockout Artist*, inspired the frankly bizarre Harry Crews project, the all-female power trio Lydia conceived with Sonic Youth's Kim Gordon as a tribute group to his hard-bitten writings. Thus did she reconcile literary interest and an appetite for destructive guitar. The trio, completed by professional wrestler Sadie Mae on drums, managed a single European tour in 1990, documented by the live album *Naked In Garden Hills*. "Three rockin' chicks on stage felt good at the time,"

remembers Lydia fondly. "I think it was a great experiment in spontaneous torture. It was really fun, definitely the most pleasant smelling tour I'd ever been on. We could've profited from a bit more structure, but it certainly was a lot of fuckin' fun making that kind of racket."

Though no winter has impacted so directly on her work since Harry Crews, she has discovered in EH Coran (1911-95), the Paris-based Romanian dandy philosopher of decline and defeat, a writer whose elegantly witty and endlessly wordweary treatises at once mirror and illuminate Lydia's sardonic reflections on life's abundant miseries. His influence is directly felt on the new *Widowspeak* compilation track "A Short History Of Decay", named after a Coran volume, and throughout *Matnikmantra*. "Ah, the great literary master," she draws, sitting back in her seat. "As usual when I find an author that speaks to my battered psyche, I try to put on all of their work, digesting everything I can get my hands on. I felt he occupied a place between Bataille and Nietzsche somehow — and that's not meant to insult his specific genius. But a philosopher with subtle humour, much sarcasm and incredible poetry — what more do I want in a book? That's why I never read fiction [now]. It's not so much his humour or his sarcasm, though, it's his contrary acceptance of the way things are that drew me to him and inspired the lyrics for *Matnikmantra*."

If *Matnikmantra* is the fruition of Lydia's illustrated word concept, it's not hard to work out why she had chosen earlier to strip the music from the spoken word, in order to confront audiences with the naked contents of her mind. Not only did it be in with her distaste for the rock industry, relatively well paid spoken word tours also afforded her maximum mobility with a minimum of baggage — that is, no guitar or other musicians to carry. Since the release of *The Unconscious* Lydia Lunch in 1985, she's worked her neuroses, her hatreds, her disappointments and frustrations through a series of often scabrously funny routines. Treading a similar path to the late, great comic Bill Hicks and often dealing with the same issues (sex, death, religion, conspiracy, mind control, conformity, drugs), Lydia alternates inspired stand-up comedy with venomously funny polemical broadsides that mark her out as one of the late 20th century's great ranters.

She's still a tireless propagandist for the form. "In the early days of spoken word it was verbal boxing matches, it was unheard of. Like, what is it? It's not poetry — poetry is easy to take in short doses. Of course it would only be men that heckled, especially when you're insulting the very essence of their being and the incredible way they've continued to destroy the entire planet and everything in it."

Spectators often found themselves caught up in Lydia's mounting polemic, unwittingly playing out their pre-determined roles. "Yeah, it would appear as if my written response was a spontaneous reaction to their interruption!" smiles Lydia. "A very beautiful trick, it's so predictable what people will say." Alongside Henry Rollins, Lydia was the catalyst of a mini-renaissance in American spoken word performance, helping to locate new audiences for poets like Wanda Coleman and Exene Cervera (of XL) and favourite writers like Hubert Selby Jr.

The braking train signals that our mountainous ascent is almost at an end. Without breaking her flow, Lydia starts packing away her stuff. "The whole point is to keep going, to confront people's apathy, their affectation, their expectations, their beliefs, which are often established at 16 or 17 and never change. It's the bane of capitalist and consumer societies — every new development, every new form of entertainment,

every new product or convenience makes one spend more money to keep up. Hence one has to work more, therefore taking more time away from quiet thought, or reading a fuckin' book where one might be able to come to a different fuckin' conclusion than what they've been bred to accept."

I had just finished Lydia's autobiographical *Paradoxa* — A Predator's Diary, which accounts for her restless years in New York, LA, London, Berlin, Amsterdam and New Orleans, sometimes living amid the most violent lowlife imaginable.

In the book, her concluding reflections on what drove her to such extremes poignantly offset her vivid chronicles of violence. She writes, "Of course to fill the void within, only the self will suffice. We reach this realisation only after we've stuffed every hole, every orifice, every opening with an indiscriminate amount of pointless junk. I began to realise how much of my energy I had been squandering on other people — I didn't need them. I needed to reclaim myself." The liberation from desire and reconciliation are constant themes in recent Lunch works like *Matnikmantra*.

Did she arrive at her conclusions after a particular moment of epiphany or some star-crossed revelation? Did she wish they had happened to her sooner, obviating the hell to come? Or did she have to pass through hell to get to where she is now?



Lydia leans forward, sipping her shades on, lighting a cigarette. "Well," she ponders, "it wasn't an overnight development, but intellectually I had reached this conclusion long before I could put it into actual play. I knew what the problem was. I was obsessed with my obsessions, that there were certain things based on adrenal overload that I repeatedly sought out as an adrenal junkie."

She pauses to inhale. "No, I haven't always been a well balanced, well sorted out person, but often I was in control and knew what I was doing. I had to experience what I experienced, with everyone that I experienced it with, in order to come to this conclusion. I'm a self-confessed glibber for information, for energy, for experience, for knowledge. There comes a point where, I hope, you're sated, you're saturated, and this is true in art, too, in order to understand all that's come before, you have to step aside. If you're on this continual non-stop locomotive hurtling straight ahead at 360 miles an hour, you can't learn from what you've accomplished, what you went through or what you've experienced."

The train whistle blows and, grabbing her bags, Lydia darts out of her seat like a sprinter from the blocks. "Hey look like we've arrived!" she yells, leaping off the train. *Matnikmantra* is released by Crippled Dick (through S&D). *Widowspeak* is released by New Millennium Communications (through Annacle). *Paradoxa* — A Predator's Diary is published by Creation Press.

In the latest reel of his **secret history of film music**, Philip Brophy reveals how Muzak seals the airless modern worlds of Jacques Tati, David Lynch and the Coen Brothers

As the most carefully crafted inversion of music's sweet nothings, Muzak occupies a peculiar place in the terrain of film music. Its self-conscious presence is occasionally felt in early 70s counterculture films, where instrumental music softly playing in an elevator, waiting room or restaurant signifies the anaesthetisation of middle class America. Here, the music is coded as a form of socio-political somnambulism. The point is as obvious as a *Rolling Stone* editorial, and the effect is just as cheap. Even though such social spaces have not used lush 50s style Muzak or squaresville cover versions for more than 20 years now, film makers have continued to deploy Muzak as feeble satirical critique. Nowadays, you're more likely to hear Kenny G, Vivaldi, Mariah Carey, Deep Forest or the Betty Blue score in an elevator. Unlike Muzak, such music has

icons or performances that trumpet the heroics of beat, hippy or college counterculture, but Tati's films smother the viewer with the oppressiveness of the finicky, style-obsessed bourgeoisie and their mania for cosmetising the social terrain. The hardcore Muzak featured in his films openly declares the vapid, aerated artness that exists within that most suspect of aesthetic categories — the beautiful.

The 70s cinematic aesthetic of bludgeoning both ignorant and knowing forms of artificiality with the rubber mallets of realism and naturalism contributed to the mandate that film music be active in its statement, proactive in its presentation and committed to its realisation. Not surprisingly, this has led to an ongoing 70s style aesthetic that feels at home with World Music eco-cliches of panpipes, pygmy samples and libranes of exotic

# muzak

## for films & airports

clear identity and purpose. It is not designed for its presence to be erased when your consciousness — it is there to fuse its dimensional beauty with your own landscaped lifestyle.

The earliest and most assured inversion of Muzak's numbing self-erasure is to be found in the colour films of Jacques Tati. Muzak — a mix of stock source music and composed involutes — permeates *Monsieur Oncle* (1958), *Playtime* (1967), *Traffic* (1972) and *Parade* (1974). Tati did not simply allude to the then contemporary flavour of glitzy, pseudo-jazz, cocktail combos — his films actually depict the social enervations of such music. His scored moments are piped through the visible architecture of the urban design upon which Tati based his gags. Automation, urbanisation and mechanisation are all inducted as bourgeois ideals, while the Muzak wafting out of offices, cafes and restaurants in Tati's films furnishes the ambience of the disinfected city. Films like *Five Easy Pieces* and *The Godfather* frame Muzak in opposition to the songs,



**Pocked by modernity:**  
Tati's *Playtime* (left) (above)  
Lynch's *Five Pieces*







percussion sounds. Art cinema especially resembles the social domains from which these post-late-Muzak stylings emerge. Here, all critical distance evaporates, rony congeals and the arty film score functions identically to the cheesy aural nootropes that used to irritate Tab.

It took the violently obvious postmodernism of David Lynch's *Twin Peaks* (1989) to make a clear statement on the preceding 20 years of collaborations between empty beauty and the essentialism inherent in airbrushed lifestyles. *Twin Peaks* engages in a deft historical revisionism. Cinema has often utilised America's Southern and Midwestern states as regressive repositories of everything that East Coast intellectualism abhors — in particular, insularity, racism and xenophobia. The soundtracks of most social issue films since the 50s constructed a dialectic between the orchestral score and quotations of folk musics. As an industrialised fabrication which the listener consumes rather than identifies with, Muzak never appears in social picture scenarios. *Twin Peaks* is a Peyton Place whose natural aural ambience of timber mills has been neutralised by the Muzak cooing out of diners, hotels and casinos. No local indigenous music is evident, it's all been replaced by a smothering, somnambulant softness. If Muzak is the music of soulless machines, *Twin Peaks* posits people as a mix of the mechanical, the mystical, the soulless and the sleepless. *Twin Peaks* feeds this blanket of aural repression into the score, turning it into a 'possessed Muzak'. That is, the score is trapped into behaving like Muzak while silencing any meta-textual mechanisms of character interiority and psychological inquiry.

Yet few moments in *Twin Peaks* actually sound like classic Muzak. If anything, Angelo Badalamenti's score is like a slowed-down rendering of Michael Mann's electronic soundscaping. Badalamenti's rockably reverberant, highly digital, strings are extremely electronic, the dark, lumbering, Herrmannesque arrangements are eerily modern, the blurred jazz intonations recall the early Minimalist sensalism of John Adams's *American Standard*. But one sound anchors the main theme in this world of the beautiful: the 'water guitar' of Vinnie Bell. Since the 50s, Bell has recorded numerous light instrumental/pop covers albums. A renowned experimenter with amplifiers, studio effects and tape manipulation — he was the first king of the double speed guitar — Bell invented the shimmering vibrato of the 'water guitar', which helped Ferrelle And Teacher score a huge international hit with their cover version of the theme from *Airport* (1970). The irony of Easy Listening stars having a hit with Alfred Newman's last score, itself inspired by airport lounge Muzak, certainly belies the postmodern agenda of *Twin Peaks*. The sleepy death-eroscopism of hearing heavenly music before boarding what might turn out to be your last flight permeated Enid's *Music For Airports* (1978) when it was piped into JFK, and the angelic music — from the Debussy opera *Lakmé* — used in the British Airways television ads. By the time of *Twin Peaks*, almost 20 years of beautiful music, clearly coded with death had been amassed: this will be the last sweetness you hear before fading to nothingness. The texture of

Badalamenti's Muzak effects and Vinnie Bell's waiting room music resonates strongly in *Twin Peaks*, accounting for much of the haunting qualities of the TV series.

Contemporary Muzak behaves similarly in the Coen Brothers' *The Big Lebowski* (1998), but it is modulated by a penchant for object blindness and the numbingly ugly. Like *Twin Peaks*, the production design is unneringly modern without resorting to camp. Many Muzak moments shine: The Gypsy Kings' version of The Eagles' 'Hotel California' plays in the bowling alley; Jeff Bridges pleads with an African-American cab driver to turn off the radio when The Eagles come on; Bridges listens to whole songs on a cruddy Walkman while he smokes joints in the bath; a trio of German thugs blast bad, John Foa-like Electro angst from a ghetto blaster; Esquivel bubbles as a bimbo paints her toenails by the pool; Yima Sumac performs at the beach party of a wealthy pornographer. Not all these moments are classically Muzak — but they each demonstrate how all forms of music can be emptied of value in the process of their production and consumption, rendering them as an aural nothingness inside which people either find solace or terror.

The suburban mall pall of *The Big Lebowski* echoes the Coens' excursions into stop-and-shop culture in *Raising Arizona* (1985) and *Fargo* (1996), the latter being their most intense study of contemporary essentialism. Both feature sublime scenes of Muzak-infected domains, which vividly underline how the Coens' visual stinility is invariably counterpointed by composer Carter Burwell's hyper-eclectic scoring.

Against *Fargo*'s opening white screen, a luridly evocative title theme swells in volume. It feels Gaelic, yet it moves like a funeral march. Performed with a gypsy waywardness, it climbs in mythical scale. Its emotional content is the exact opposite of Muzak. Where Muzak signifies nothing by draining all recognisable dynamics into a muted referencing of a known tune, the conflicting dramatics of Burwell's *Fargo* score accrues impossibly high emotional levels. Meanwhile, the pure white screen gives zero clues as to how this music should be read. In fact, only in the very last scenes of the film does the score reveal its identity as a mellowed acceptance of the most extreme deviations of normality in the domestic realm. Rather than making explicit the dysfunctionality of its many characters and the mind-destroying circumstances in which they sink or swim, *Fargo* chooses to acknowledge that normality is not an ideal to aspire to: it is merely a waiting veil like the snow of North Dakota. It falls on you, you sweep it away or you rug up against it. Though it can often look beautiful, it can make you lose your way. Burwell's scored moments — decisively few yet critically placed — make a clear statement about beautiful nothingness through overscoring to create an alienating effect. In the end, the gorgeous orchestrations of his music are tempered by the abrasive existential veneer which created Muzak in the first place.

Where Muzak murmurs the nothingness of sweetness directly into your inner ear, Burwell's score to *Fargo* scars your aural consciousness with the realisation that no amount of sweetness can cover the nothingness of everyday life —



Above: Dance Ecstasy 2001 logo  
Far right: The Mover's logo

Unfettered by considerations of tempo, tact or taste, the DJs and producers which cluster around the Frankfurt-based **PCP** label have broken Gabba's speed barriers to soundtrack the post-Apocalypse with their Gloomcore Techno. Words: Simon Reynolds



# HARDCORE THAN THE REST

**Q**ueens, New York, a Saturday night in April: Lenny Dee, Hardcore Techno warlord and boss of Brooklyn's Industrial Strength label, is celebrating "30 years breathing, 15 years DJ'ing" at Club Voodoo in the sedate suburb of Bayside. For his birthday bash he's flown in a bunch of Gabba allies from across the Atlantic — stormcore DJ Manu Le Malin from Paris, English hard trance outfit Nebula 2 (whose 1992-era breakbeat Techno for Reinforced reputedly blew Goldie's mind at Rage), plus this mysterious figure from Germany called The Mover, who is making his US debut.

Since 1990, using more than 20 different pseudonyms, The Mover has released hundreds of tracks via the cluster of labels affiliated to Frankfurt based PCP — tracks whose catalogue numbers are recited in awestruck tones by Hardcore cognoscenti. But when The Mover takes over the decks a little after 1am, few of the teen ravers on the dancefloor seem to realise that the nondescript-looking fellow in the DJ booth is a living legend. They know his tunes, though, roaring their approval and moshing violently to the bonehead bounce of Gabbanthems like Turbulence's "Six Millions Ways To Die", with its Sid Vicious "My Way" intro and murderous ragga sample.

The Mover also touches on the more 'musical' side of PCP's output, and that of its sister labels Dance Ecstasy 2001 and Cold Rush — a style some people on the scene call Phuture Techno. By Gabba standards, Renegade Legion's "Torsion" is midtempo and

multitextured, its death ray riffs strobing your flesh and subsuming the dancefloor in a phosphorescent frenzy. "Apocalypse Never", recorded by Mover and released under his Pildriver alter-ego, is even more intense, seething around your limbs like a miasma of sentient nerve gas. As with a lot of PCP/Mover music, the track's dark exultation is poised on the brink between the Dionysian and the frankly fascist. Between mob and army, desiring machine and war machine, its synth stabs and ungodly undulations get your goosebumps doing the goosestep.

An hour after The Mover vacates the DJ booth, the Deeday rave comes to an abrupt end, with Bayside's fire marshalls shutting down the party for being overcrowded (the official limit is 300, but around 800 turned up). Lenny Dee throws a fit, but the kids disperse in good humour, even after they've driven miles into the wilderness of New York's outer boroughs and paid \$15 for a bare three hours of entertainment. All buzzed up and nowhere to go, I'm disappointed too. But at least I can tell my grandchildren I once saw The Mover.

*"We want to carve our initials into the body that is history. So that in 20 years people go, 'Hardcore Techno — that was PCP', like punk was The Sex Pistols and rock was The Rolling Stones" — The Mover, 1993*

**U**nder his more experimental aliases especially — Allen Christ, Pildriver, Tilt and Mescalum United — The Mover has created a body of work as consummate as that of Jeff Mills, yet he is the forgotten man of Techno. But once upon a time, PCP were briefly hip. In 1992, Aphex Twin remixed Mescalum United's classic "We Have Arrived" — a stormtrooper stampede with a blaring bass riff which blueprinted Gabba

— for the Belgian R&S label. R&S also released an EP of Mover broadcast tracks called 'Hellrazor' under the name Spiritual Combat. In May 1993, the PCP crew even played at Knowledge, the London pure Techno club founded by DJs Colin Faver and Colin Dale and run on strict no-breakbeat, no-Hardcore policies.

But this was at the tail end of rave's golden era — a hazy time when DJs as various as Richie Hawtin, Sven Väth, Lenny Dee and Dave Navaro could play on the same bill, and an individual DJ set might encompass broken Hardcore, Acid-house, proto-Trance, breakbeat, even House. By 1993, the rave scene was shrinking, with some following the Trance route, some going into Jungle, and some abandoning the dancefloor altogether for Ambient and experimental Techno. Another option — at least in Northern Europe — was Gabba.

The G-word is why PCP are never mentioned in 'dancing' Techno circles. The Mover's music languishes amid Gabba's murky, inferno of headbanger beats, kamikaze 200-plus bpm, and testosterone-frenzied sadomasochism. While PCP are heroes in Holland (the birthplace of Gabba), an ever-expanding family of sub-labels — Dance Ecstasy 2001, Gold Rush, Pumpfunk, Futureworld, White Bricks, Kitzak, Super Space Corps, No Mercy, Tummy Tashole — is an empire in informal code as regards Germany. PCP's antagonism, 'there's won them few friends here, eh?' 'At War' — a Mover production — was a giant fuck you to Link Storm, the label/promoter who ruefully raves rave mainstream and are responsible for Berlin's annual Love Parade. The Mover's determined anonymity (apart from a few farcical interviews, he shuns the press). PCP has stonewalled my own attempts to interview them for more than a year) has also contributed to the label's low profile.

Yet there are signs that The Mover is sick of subterranean existence and is hungry for respect. On his Marshall Masters track 'I Like It Loud', his hitherto concealed real name — Marc Acardipane — and photograph are emblazoned on the front cover. He's just released a double CD anthology, *Marc Acardipane — Best Of 1989-1997*, whose cover also prominently features his German citizen's photo ID card. On the recording front, there's been a

flurry of Mover activity, with his Pildiver/Till 12" 'Apocalypse Never/Hell-E-Copter' on Cold Rush and the launch of an Acardipane-run experimental label called Adrenacrome. Maybe The Mover's days in the shadows are over. Maybe...

'Mover is dark because it's set in the future of mankind,' he told Hardcore fanzine *Alien Underground*. 'Can't possibly justify seeing a happy end to this stupid human drama. Darkness is not mystical, it's your everyday reality.'

In some ways, the label that PCP most resembles is Reinforced — albeit a Reinforced stranded in a perpetual 1993, a limbo of making world-shattering music that was barely heard, let alone respected, by people outside the Hardcore cave ghetto. By late 1992, PCP — like Reinforced — were on a 'journey from the light' that took them into the darkside of drug culture. The two labels share an interest in futurology and millennial doom. Compare 4 Hero's Nostradamus-inspired 1993 track 'Students Of The Future' with Marc Acardipane's apocalyptic phuture myths of 2017. And like Reinforced, PCP track titles and cover imagery often evoke ideas of heroic quests or paramilitary resistance. 4 Hero's first single was 'Combat-Dancer', while R&S released a PCP compilation EP entitled 'Warriors'.

Above all, Reinforced and PCP have a similarly ambivalent relationship with the Hardcore rave scenes with which they're linked: Jungle and Gabba respectively. Early on, both labels released hugely popular anthems; yet both rapidly became too 'advanced' for their respective scenes. They were shot by boogies too 'musical' and experimental for the rave audience's drug-determined requirements or the crowd-pleasing DJ's functionalist approach, yet — as far as the outside world was concerned — they were irretrievably tarred with Hardcore's brush. As PCP artist Sickbeard (aka Reign, aka Miro, aka Renegade Legion) complained to *Fallout fanzine*, 'The problem is the normal Techno scene doesn't want PCP and with the extreme Hardcore scene, PCP is too soft somehow.' Although it still occasionally scores with Gabba anthems, most of PCP's output is too atmospheric, too well produced, and — at

around 180 bpm — too slow for the Gabba and Hardcore markets. Another parallel between Reinforced and PCP is their ambivalence at side to drug culture. 4 Hero are at least open about, more or less. Whenever their records exploits may or may not have risen, PCP assumed an anti-Ecstasy stance by early 1993. On the back of the first *Dance Ecstasy 2001* compilation, there's a tiny pictogram of a man dropping an MDMA-laced tablet in a wastebasket, plus the legend 'E...? No!!!'. Failing in 1993, one of the PCP posers declared: 'We've seen too many people get fucked up on E. We go to the clubs and the people are like zombies. Perhaps they started two years ago with half an E... But in Frankfurt, now they go out and take five or eight Es and you see some people, they never come down. Some people assumed that we take a lot of drugs because of the names we use, like PCP, Mescaline, United... but when we say 'E? No!', perhaps people see that you don't need E to make music, or to enjoy yourselves.'

And yet PCP have continued to sidestep the E-monster mentality. It's not just the musicians' proliferating aliases (Pildriver, Freeze-E-Style, Trip Commando) and track titles ('E-Loco', 'XTC Express', 'Hell-E-Copter'). Symbolically, this is drug music, no two ways about it. In his populist Gabba incursions — 'Rave Creator', 'Leatherhead', 'Nasty', 'Django', 'T-Bone Castro', 'Smash!', 'Turbulence' — Marc Acardipane has come up with a thousand variations on the E-rush activating 'Mentasm' sound (as invented by Joey Beltram and Mundo Muzique in their 1991 Second Phase track 'Mentasm'), then turned into a demonic drage-drone by Human Resource on 'Dominator'). And he has produced a thousand shades of monstrous monotony out of the distorted four-to-the-floor kickdrum that is Gabba's lowest common denominator pulse. (And why shouldn't he exploit the reduced horizons of the Dutch market, when he helped sire Gabba in the first place with 'We Have Arrived'?).

Just as Reinforced's darkcore delirium of convulsive breakbeats and ecstasymorphic textures plugged into the paranoid sensorium of the ripped-out Brit rave in 1992-93, similarly PCP make Ecstasy music bent to the sinister. When MDMA is taken in large amounts over a long period of time, is lovey dovey, empathy-inducing effects (associated with the neurochemical serotonin) wear off, leaving just the jittery, amphetamine-like buzz (caused by the neurotransmitter dopamine). Rave's hyperaerobic euphoria mutates into a foreboding of 'wired energy' (as DJ Hype titled a 1993 darkcore track). Ecstasy's warm glow is replaced by an affectless intensity, a cold rush.

Cold Rush is the name of the PCP sister label through which The Mover has released some of his most inspired music. Beginning in 1993, Acardipane and his comrades started making 'music for huge space arenas', tracks whose cavernous reverberations even the most cramped club into a giant industrial hangar. At home, on headphones, you feel like you're inside a vast cathedral space carved out beneath the frozen methane crust of Pluto. Cold Rush's ten releases to date are steeped in Numskool melancholy, wistful, pitiable, lugubrious melodies that seem to wilt and waver in the air. Although the kickdrum is still pretty fast, around 170-180 bpm, the 'drige-like' droop of slummy atmospherics make the Cold Rush sound feel slower than it actually is. Although the ludicrous oxymoron Ambient Gabba is both appealing and appropriate, *Twelve Gloomcore*.

Like the original darkside Jungle of 1993, Gloomcore sonically captures the transition between loved up and fucked up; ecstasy and oblivion, 'getting high' and 'getting out of it'. Rave Creator's 'Astral Demons' and 'Thru Eternal Fog' hinge around sickly shiny drones that evoke the hideously inebriated descent of the Ecstasy comedown. Cypher's 'Marchin' in a Haze' (from the gloriously titled EP 'Doomed Bunkerlords') kicks off with the vociferous query 'is anybody out there?'. The answer is no, communicated not by silence but a aqueous wuwo-cosmic chum of sound. Underneath, a trudging, parade ground beat marches you into the centre of the demonic mandala swirl of void-matter. The mentasmic, maelsstrom sounds like 'crank-fugs' (the amphetamine freak's delusion that insects are crawling under your flesh) that have bared the skin and swarmed into a loosed horse. 'The Fug Track' by Barn is pseudogothic clopen in honour of those dehydrated slits standing at the rave's

better end) starts with the historic injunction "empty your minds" and fulfils its own command with a frigid inferno of wrath vapour, simulating the sensory eclipse of the head rush — the whiteout caused by taking one E too many.

Highlights of the Cold Rush series, all these tracks were produced by Marc Acardipane, and all bear the legend "Created somewhere in the lost zones". (One exception is Cold Rush #7: "Created in Pressure Zones" — so better take care, Doom Supporter!) The Mover and Reign/Renegade Legion have pursued a similar Gloomcore direction on the Dance Ecstasy 2001 label (which more often puts out rare trendy hard Trance similar to German labels like Noom). Tracks like Reign's "Light And Dark" and "Skeletons on their skin surface in a sort of object inversion of MDMA's sensuous synaesthesia. Co-produced by Acardipane, Inferno Bros' "Slaves To The Rave" is a savagely sarcastic anthem of entrapment and zombiehood, which has nonetheless been embraced without irony by the Dutch Gabba scene.

"Well you know, I'm a machine, I'm wired up... I'm roaming the earth and it's nice and damn here. The sound of Mover should speak for itself" — Marc Acardipane, talking to *Alien Underground*

Not much is known about Marc Acardipane in the *Alien Underground* interview, he cites his formative influences as HipHop, Acid and the darker side of Detroit — specifically, X-101 (an Underground Resistance alter-ego back when Mad Mike and Jeff Mills had more in common with Nordic Hardcore than you might imagine) and Suburban Knight's 1990 classic "The Art Of Stalking" (whose twitchy trepidation inspired The Mover trilogy "Frontal Sickness", "Frontal Sickness Part 2" and "Final Sickness"). Other, less renowned sources for Acardipane's doomier-than-thou sound and vision include Belgian proto-Gabba outfits like 80 Aum and forgotten rave unit The Mackenzie.

As Kodwo Eshun points out in his book *More Brilliant Than The Sun*, Techno's avoidance of trappist iconography and its lack of lyrics mean that "peripheral" elements — alter-egos, track titles, cover imagery, logos, slogans printed on the label or etched into the run-out vinyl — become crucial. PCP releases are as rich in esotericist clues and audiovisual triggers as Underground Resistance's ongoing self-mythology. They have some of the best artist names and song titles around: Terrorist's "Prayers Of Our Clan", The Mover's "Comets Swarm Rising" and "Nightlight (Norstop To Kias)", Reign's "The Zombie-Leader Is Approaching" EP, Turbulence's "Bass Gladiators", Dr Macalene's "Dimension Of The Doomed", Alien Christ's "The Art Of Shredding", the name Renegade Legion makes you think of Kurtz's battalion gone AWOL in the Vietnamese jungle, pursuing unorthodox methods to the mechanisation of the US military establishment. The Mover alter-ego Mescalrum United similarly evokes psychedelic delirium and barmy armies of soccer thug berserkers. Visually, the logo for Dance Ecstasy 2001 is an ectoplasmic energy shape that could be an alien, reform insensating itself into your nervous system and gradually seizing control, or the brain virus incarnation of the mezbom sound itself.

"Imagine surviving earth after nuclear destruction and enjoying what you see, that's how it feels when you listen to it." — Marc Acardipane, talking to *Alien Underground*

In his Mescalrum United guise, Acardipane has recorded some of his most experimental work. The Mescalrum trilogy of "Symphonies Of Steel" EPs escalate from the Die Krupps/Niebauer clangour of "Part One" to the Merzbow-like Gabba concrete cacophony of "Part 3". In between came "Jupiter Pulse", the B-side of

"Symphonies Of Steel, The Second Love" — a foray into what Acardipane has called "sack Ambient", a beastless deathscapes of noxious fumes and alternam atmospheres. If most PCP music has a militaristic feel, a blitzkrieg surge towards wargamic release, "Jupiter Pulse" is the sound of post-catastrophic catastrophe. Perhaps frustrated by the lack of recognition garnered by his detours into isolationist abstraction (which certainly bear comparison with, say, Porter Ricks or the superb new Plastikman album), Acardipane's new label Adrenacrome is devoted to experimental Elektronica. The metallic, glossy reflective sleeves break with Gabba's traditional iconography of horror movie grotesquerie and are more suggestive of a minimalist Techno imprint. Ironically, and despite the promising name (adrenacrome is a mythical adrenal-based drug mentioned in *For And Looting In Las Vegas*, said to feel like being plugged into a million volt socket), Acardipane's first seven track EP the label is far less interesting than his Gabba-affiliated output.

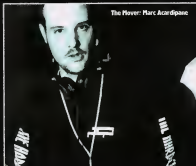
Yearnings for credibility aside, Acardipane knows which side his bread is buttered. I doubt that he'll ever renounce the populist pull of the Hardcore market. His latest Marshall Masters release "I Like It Loud" is a joyously crenellated stomp of Gabba Volkstrunk with a melody riff that sounds like the Oompah! song in *Charlie And The Chocolate Factory*. And in the sleeve notes to Marc Acardipane — *Best 1989-97*, he addresses the Rotterdam massive with a mazy "to all you dutch Gabbers, nuff respect and stay Hardcore for the year 2017".

Despite occasional stabs at Electro-style attery rhythm programming (Mescalrum United's "Vs Evil") and breakbeat science (from 1992's Spiritual Combat EP to his juicy Jungle-meets-classical novelty record released as Beethoven), Acardipane has mostly stuck with the monolithic four-to-the-floor kick drum. Gabba's "funklessness" may be the ultimate barrier to Acardipane's rehabilitation and recognition by the Techno cognoscenti. Gabba's piledriver pummel is unrelenting and monotonous, but it doesn't have to be braindead. PCP's punisher beats are cunningly infected, alternating between saturated intensity and stripped down severity. Above all, creativity comes into play with the imbral density of the kick itself: how thick, how wide, how voluptuously concussive each cranium-denting impact can be. When Gabba fans groan the chant "Need a bass", they're not

actually talking about bass in the conventional sense, but rather the trampoline-like boinggg of the smearedly dozzled kickdrum. Mover and his PCP comrades have created symphonies in four-to-the-floor like Pildriver's "Pitch-Hiier" and Amir's "Bass Drum Elevation", multi-layered architectures constructed out of jet kicks, claps and hi-hats, plus the halo of reverb. What this music offers is a different kind of rhythmic compulsion from funk's syncopated, hip tugging grooveiness: a white line fervour of tunnel vision fixation.

Anyway, as a musical attribute, funk is just the tinnest bit overrated, don't you think? Whenever a dance genre starts pining for a return to funk, it's a sure sign of encroaching debility. Detroit peels UK Techno started to become irrelevant around about the time producers began prattling about "funk", while drum 'n' bass's current two step and acridly convoluted bassline stagnation is accompanied by funkster rhetoric. You can hear the same kind of talk from 1998's most ludicrous micro-genre — nu skool breaks aka sublink — which is basically "Intelligent" Big Beat, or Big Beat with all the fun taken out of it.

All these scenes began as anti-cheese manoeuvres by hipsters hoping to alienate the rave audience. What I love about PCP and The Mover's work is that they're not scared to kick being com. Along with the exquisitely nuanced textures, there's always a big fat hook for the ravefloor massive, a riff. Jungle lost its common touch last year, its last gasp of cheery quaveriness being Doc Scott's "Shadow Boxing", with its almost comically doctored riff. Here's hoping that Marc Acardipane never loses his flair for the all-conquering, avant-lumpen cliché. □



The Mover: Marc Acardipane

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**Pluramon** is a non-band featuring Cologne's best avant musicians — but it only exists on Marcus Schmickler's digital hard drive. Words: Rob Young. Photography: Iris Garrelfs



Here they come, the replicant cowboys, the *Render Bandits* — riding out of the Rhineland dustbowl through Pickup Canyon to hijack the Floozie Express. Suddenly the film jams, squeaking and bubbling in the heat of the projector bulb, and you realise you've been audio-viewing the latest sonic fictions of Marcus Schmickler. The Cologne based prodigy has just released his second Pluramont album, *Render Bandits*, following his monstrous remix of his friend The Bionaut's track 'Wild Horse Ance' last year, where he doled the quartz-driven, silicone-enhanced Cologne Techno beat in a fug of gong-like humbucker chimes.

Having studied composition at the Cologne Music Academy, Marcus Schmickler received a grounding in modern computer composition and tape based art — the source of last year's acclaimed acousmatic CD *Wahl-Sub* — and is a fervent admirer of Cologne's electronic founding fathers, Karlheinz Stockhausen. "He's so amazing," exclaims Schmickler during an e-mail exchange from his home in Cologne's so-called Belgian quarter, "his immensely visionary music during the 50s and 60s you know that he created his personal 'Wortbild' [word picture], a mixture of what he considers a myth — maybe a setting for his work, *Le Lullu* — and what he lives in person. Part of that is Pluramont, star in this context where peoples of all different races and cultures — pluralism — live under respect of their individual rights in a universal community — monism. A utopia."

Several years ago, Schmickler recorded music for a soundtrack for an experimental film about a man from Death Valley, USA, who disappeared one day from his trailer park, never to be seen again, in the end his music wasn't used, but his interest in film remains, and his methods echo cinema's time-based illusions. Films, after all, are not moving pictures but the illusion of continuity. Digital recording is now as much a flickerbox game as the movies, and a DDD orchestral recording, stitched together from hundreds or even thousands of any eds of best-takes, is as much an Electronic construction as a Protech track or a Luc Ferrari soundscapes.

## rhine tone

# COWBOY

Pluramont is another kind of replicant music — a modern counterpart of Can's Ethno-Forgery Series. *Render Bandits* breathes lightly on familiar terrain, such as the gritty swang of early Can and especially the Talk Talk of *Laughing Stock*. Don't call it rock, though "It's simply not a band thing," emphasises Schmickler "It's at the hybrid edge. I like that. Working with the others becomes televisual."

Feeding Schmickler's hard disk with raw music materials, if not their presence, the "others" include one of Marcus's flatmates, Jan St. Werner of House On Mars and Microstoria, Frank Dornert of A-Music, drummer Jochen Rueckert, and the magisterial percussive force of Jak Liebesitz. Composed from their sampled and recorded instrumental parts, this music has a memory — a pool of sampled gestures — but no body. "This is a non-band," reiterates Marcus Schmickler "It's not a recording of a Krautrock session. I don't think in the rock music genre. For myself, the guitar is an instrument which I have a very close relationship with, because I started with it, and I can find nuances in guitar playing more easily than with other instruments. Also it is possible to create sound which is not necessarily received as guitar sound. It can sound like a synthesizer or anything else which is not clearly defined, and still have pressure or quality. And that was the basic reason for working with the instrument, not because I wanted to redefine rock music."

Pluramont's exotic sleeve artwork, collaged by Heike Sperling from moonscapes, medical etchings and scientific symbols, sits somewhere between Max Ernst, Francis

Picabia and Terry Gilliam. The music within is similarly constructed by thrusting incongruous motifs, played on an arsenal of mythological instruments, among them baguettes, picadros and snoring vi processors, into unaccustomed environments. "I don't feel that the instrument names are entirely cryptic," he says. "It's a bit like playing 'guess what'. I felt I needed the freedom to decide what has to happen with the supplied materials and their arrangements. That means a real instrument someone had played, or vice versa."

A self confessed perfectionist, Schmickler worries about the compatibility of his ingredients, and enjoys getting his hands soiled in the mix. "Electronic music gives the possibility to easily control every aspect of the musical form," he enthuses. "The possibilities of sound transformation haven't changed that much in the last decade. It's just much easier to handle, much faster. The interesting thing about working with 'real' instrument sounds as one step of the production process is that every sound has its individual nuance, a certain taste. The reduction of the used material allows a closer contact to the abilities or qualities of the individual instrument and in controlling polyphony. It doesn't necessarily lead into unfamiliar territory. It's just that many people aren't used to it. Of course it's easy to create a technical environment that generates and transforms music in an unforeseeable way."

The first Pluramont album, *Pick Up Canyon*, found Marcus twanging and tub-thumping his way through nine pieces of gritty guitar ambience. His aim, he said at the time, was to "give a kind of kick or thrill which doesn't belong to the kind of material — for example, combining guitar music with electroacoustic music." *Render Bandits* combines these elements with greater fluency, adding digital whines and whistles to the play of amplified steel string chimes. "I chose the title for the record," he explains, "because it fulfils these criteria. It hints at a technical aspect: the digital music aspect [rendering] is the term for the way a computer depicts images or sounds on screen. What you hear is what you hear, or a rebuilt structure — based on arithmetic analysis — of what you think you hear. Since you hear it from an ever-multiplicable medium, it's not necessary to care about it any further as long as you're not interested in the 'how'."

"Bandits," he continues, "because during the making I sometimes had these Spaghetti Western images: the drums wooden and dry as bullet-impacts in the wood; melodic

tolerances as the walk of the non-shaved, black-toothed, wooden-legged hotelkeeper and the brave horse with Augenklappe [blinkers] after decades of desert and prairie rides — minimalist overtone played as the sound of winds in a wide deep canyon

"I didn't want to do a record like the first," he adds "It was a good start, and the form is somewhat I feel *Render Bandits* is warmer and/or happier than the first. But still every recording is a technical challenge or exploration. You could call it 'compositing' if you don't like the word 'composition'. Or soundproduction/environmerntgardenig."

As one of the most distinctive voices within Cologne's new music fraternity, Schmickler is involved in the nurturing of an accessible music informed by academic strategies and the histories of Techno and avant rock, without diluting any of their force. "Serious composers are not so well informed about music history, or recent music history," he asserts "Whereas a lot of consumers, people who listen to music at home, are much better informed than the composers themselves. There are so many different ways, when you walk into a good record shop, of how music can be done, or should be done, or is done, and a lot of the traditionalists are not interested in that. ... *Render Bandits* is out now on *Little Plateaux* (through SRO)



# charts

Playlists from the outer limits of planet sound

## Liquid 15

**Señor Coconut** Baile Con (Rather Interesting)  
**Stock,hausen & Walkman** Oh, My Bag! (Hot Air)  
**General Magic** Die Mondlandung (Mego)  
**Morpheus Urban Field** Golden Star (Incoming!)  
**Stephen Mallinder** Pow Wow Plus (Fetish)  
**The Roger Tube Ensemble** Permatonic Surprise (Rather interesting)  
**Liquid Liquid** Entre Production (99/Mo' Wax)  
**Scala** Beauty Nowhere (Sematore)  
**Radio Boy** Wishmountain Is Dead (Antiphon)  
**Impulse One** Six Four One Seven (K7)  
**Plastikman** Consumed (NovaMusic)  
**Various** Wild Style: OST (Beyongoko)  
**Curd Duca** Elevator (Mille Plateaux)  
**Brown** Brown (Rather Interesting)  
**Kirlian** Who's Got The Flave (at 45 rpm) (Disco B)  
*Compiled by Liam J. Hoels, Liquid Florence: Italy and London 333 Club, every second Wednesday of the month*

## Freezone 15

**Ask** Disconnected Bliss (Discus)  
**Various** Mini 2000-3 Volume Two (Mini 2000)  
**Sonic Youth** A Thousand Leaves (Geffen)  
**Turedomson** Joe Boy In Mexico (Opium Sonica)  
**Tortoise** TNT (City Slang)  
**Archangel** Heartcore (Third Ear)  
**Kristin Hersh** Strange Angels (4AD)  
**Massive Attack** Mezzanine (Virgin)  
**Kismet** Wake Up Goods (Tone Casualties)  
**Rodellus** Aquarella (All Saints)  
**Rhomb** Hidden Topographies (The Foundry)  
**Liza Gerrard & Pieter Bourke** Quality (4AD)  
**Leslie Hortobagyi** Summa Technologiae (Tone Casualties)  
**Arvo Part** Beauty (Virgin Classics)  
**Anastasia** Nokturno (Third Ear)  
*Compiled by Morgan Kostasinoski: Freezone: Sound And Vision, Klang 103 Skape, Republic Of Macedonia: Thursdays 11pm-2am*

## These 15

**Dirk Raaijmakers** Complete Tape Music (Composers Voice/Near)  
**Hecker** IT: Ito 15, 19 75 (Mego Promo)  
**Harvin Gaye** Trouble Man (Matzow)  
**zoviet'france** Feedback (Mont Aux Vaches/Staalplast)  
**Iannis Xenakis** Electronic Works (EMF)

**Vittorio Gelmetti** Musiche Elettroniche (Nepless)  
**Walter Marchetti** Arrabarbarus (Nepless)  
**Alec Empire** Squeeze The Trigger (Digital Hardcore)  
**Scalpel** Eclipse (Nauve Recordings)  
**Rawn** Electronic Sound Patterns 1 (Planck Promo)  
**Justin Bennett** The Mosques Of Tanger (Staalplast)  
**Stock,hausen & Walkman** Oh, My Bag! (Hot Air)  
**Workshop De Lyon** Fondus (Rectangle)  
**Raymond Scott** Soothing Sounds For Baby Volumes 1-3 (Basta)  
**Evan Parker with Noel Akchotté, Lawrence Casserley and Joel Ryan** Live At Les Instants Chavres (Leo)  
*Compiled by These Records, 712 Brook Drive, London SE17 4QQ Tel 0171 587 5349*

## The Office Ambience

**Grooverider** Mysteries Of Funk (Higher Ground/Sony)  
**The Jimi Hendrix Experience** Experience: OST (Charly)  
**Various** Ethiopiques Vol 4: Ethio Jazz & Musique Instrumental 1969-74 (Buda Musique)  
**Charles Hayward** Double Agent(s) (Locus Solus)  
**Gescom** MmDisc (Or)  
**Tom Waits** Beautiful Maladies: The Island Years (Island)  
**Dr John** Desirevelly Bonnaroo (Atco)  
**Bernie Maupin & Dr Pat Gleeson** Driving While Black (Intuition)  
**Pole** CD1 (Kiff SM)

**Bobby Previte** Downtown Lullaby (Depth Of Field)  
**Various** FGL: De Granada A La Luna (Sombra)  
**Min Xiao-fen** With Sex Composers (Avant)  
**Various** Custom Superpeople 2 (Charly)  
**David Tudor** Rainforest (Hode)  
**Musica Transonic with Keiji Haino** Incubation (PSF)  
**Janeau** Janeau (Ba Da Bing!)

*Compiled by The Wire Sound System*



Tom Waits



# sound check

On their uppers: July's selected albums, EPs and 12"s



**Autachre**  
LPs  
WARP MM65 CD 1211

**Gescom**  
MiniDisc  
GRONLY 1-10

Since the fantastically fixed textures of last year's *Chosic Side*, Autachre's compositions have moved beyond complexity to chaotic multiple event pile-ups. Tracks now resemble primitive organisms wriggling to tear themselves apart — tiny, unswerving, rhythmic and textural cells buzzing away in their designated corners, desperate to burst through their vacuum packing.

Trot said parts of their new Warp album definitely feel overwrought. The opening "Acroyaw2" is chattering digi-jungle with no real point. There's too much scurrying across the surface, when their real strength resides somewhere down below. They hit their stride on "Rae", with its drum pattern like a chicken's foot beaten against a sheet of gauze. It's further distinguished by a virtuosic Autachre tempo

downshift. With "Ileive" the first impression is of dandy synth doodling going nowhere, but those upper frequencies play havoc with the frontal lobes — and if you light your way through them, there are voices waiting there to greet you. "Fold4Wrap3" speeds down and slows up in untranscribable fashion. "Carc" tramps about in a lazy dope lope with a hardresser snipping away inches from the ears. Impressive, but not the great leaps forward made on *Te Repesse* or *Chosic Side*.

Autachre have a second album out this month, this time in their Gescom guise, and it's definitely the better release. As it's only available on MiniDisc, Autachre's Gescom compositions will have to shell out for a MiniDisc player, too, if they want to hear it. Gescom are undoubtedly aware of the MiniDisc's "wow" factors — like the title scrolling across the LED screen while the track is playing, what next, bouncing ball signaling texts? — but they've also investigated how the MD's digital compression of information might affect the sound. You don't need to know the psychoacoustics of the thing to enjoy it, though. If some of the disc's 45 tracks (spread

over 88 cue points) are little more than spare parts from the Autachre toolkit, parts of MiniDisc are as good as anything they've done the blue hour meditations of "Shoogazer" and "Dan Dan Dan" the compacted performances of "Is We" and "Vernin", the envelope folds and sugar twiss of "Wob Wal" and "Squashed To Pureness". A consistently astounding range of effects, treatments and transformations have given Gescom a leg up into the realm of such studio alchemists as Coil or Luc Ferrari.

**ROB YOUNG**

**Jessica Bailiff**  
Even In Silence  
KRAMER CD 026 CD

**Godspeed You Black Emperor!**  
EP/Album  
KRAMER CD 071 CD

The term space rock is applied so loosely these days, it is utterly meaningless. On this charge, the people at Kronik are repeat

## An A-Z of reviews:

**John Adams** Autachre **Derek Bailey (and friends)** Jessica Bailiff **Justin Bennett** Sir Richard Bishop **The Body Lovers** Buckethead **Cassiber/Ground Zero** Club OH **Chaos** Steve Coleman **Columbia-Princeton Electronic Music Centre** 1961-73 **Cornelius** Domo Suzuki Band **Éthiopiques Vols 1-4** John Fahey **Farmers Manual** Luc Ferrari **4 Hero** Allen Ginsberg **Goblin** Godspeed You Black Emperor! **The Grassy Knoll** Georg Gräwe Quartet **Guillermo Gregorio** Bronn Gysin **Impact Allstars** Jega **Jesus And Mary Chain** Mason Jones **Kreidler** David Kristian/Sven **Bill Laswell** Yungchen Lhamo **Masonna** Massacre **McPhee!** **Vandermark/Messier** Wim Martens **Mix Master Mike** Ben Neill **Roy Montgomery** NRG Ensemble **Lee Perry** Philus **Rain** Steve Reich **Sandoz Lab** **Technicians** Silver Apples **Spleen** Taku Sugimoto **Surgeon** Swans **Amon Tobin** David Tudor **Tom Waits** The Weakener **Jah Wobble** World Standard **Vainio/Väsinen/Vega** Vandermark Five **Viktor Dimishid Band** μ-20 **plus new compilations, avant rock, classical, critical beats, electronica and outer limits releases in brief**

**Derek Bailey**

Takes Fakes & Dead She Dances

NOV 31 CD

**Derek Bailey & Joëlle Léandre**

No Waiting

POTLACH P198 CD

**Noël Akchoté & Derek Bailey**

Close To The Kitchen .

RECTANGLE FILM

**Derek Bailey & Eugene**

Chadbourne

Tout For Teal

RECTANGLE FILM

**Derek And The Ruins**

Tohjinbo

PARADISABLE PLE11012 CD

Sometimes even the most socially adept individuals find themselves caught up in the whirl about them. You need to step back, set yourself on solid ground, maybe discover what lies beneath your feet. *Takes Fakes & Dead She Dances*, Derek Bailey's first solo release in seven years, is very much a portrait of a soloist man withdrawing from the company of others. Even the solitary word "Listen" reprinted inside the CD booklet points towards an end to dialogue. These unaccompanied performances, mostly on acoustic guitar, are gaunt, reflective affairs, more concerned with giving shape to a guiding intelligence than with opening up new space for expression.

The playing, however, is quick and lively, almost mercurial in its approach, like a graphically harsh rendering of a skull by Giacometti, the vitality of the treatment being the subject. Ideas and events are deftly sketched out and allowed to exist for a few brief moments, before being erased and replaced.

"Nuit," the longer of the two live recordings that open and close the collection, sets the tone, a piling up of scratches, runs and abrasions, interspersed with clusters of pinpoint harmonics and strange, distended

THUNDERCLAP, R. FB DOWN II: Derek Bailey with Ron Bennett



decays. The effect is one of sound being stripped to its bare bones and then set in motion. The following series of eight studio miniatures benefit enormously from Steve Beresford's generous, unfussy production, as they explore similar themes and preoccupations in greater detail and yet greater delicacy. In fact, Bailey's acoustic playing is so minutely nuanced that when he plugs in his Gibson 175 for the closing minutes of the disc, you can't help but embrace its fire as a moment of release.

Time perhaps to re-enter the social whirl. No Waiting, recorded live at Les Instants Chavérés in Montreal with Joëlle Léandre on double bass, finds Bailey making the amplifiers hum in a far more openhanded manner, even though the resulting performance has some very dark edges to it. Although they've both appeared in the same line-ups before, this is their first duo recording. As such, they don't so much play together as match each other's movements, each exploring the full range of their own instrument and the differences between them.

Bailey's electric guitar duets with Noël Akchoté, however, constitute a virtuoso display in individual volume control, Akchoté revealing a subtle use of effects in his contorted explorations of melody. Yet overall, *Close To The Kitchen* is a subdued, meditative

collection, even as the duo conjure up a whirlwind of steel pots and sharp edges seemingly from nowhere.

By contrast, Eugene Chadbourne's live set with Bailey, including onstage chatter from the 1995 Thunderclap Festival in Den Haag, is so hospitable, it's disturbing. Snatches of banjo picking and unfinished Country ballads come leering at you through the feedback, suggesting nothing more than an acid-tinged hilariously weird-out. Y'all come back now. Hear?

Tohjinbo documents Bailey's most recent encounter with the Ruins duo, Tatsuya Yoshida and Hoshio Sasaki. This is a seething, volcanic session in which Yoshida's restless drumming and Sasaki's anarchic bass treatments cascade and roar beneath the ripping sheets of noise let loose from Bailey's guitar. The trio's forward momentum is as irresistible as an advancing lava stream. In this session, it's not so much a matter of testing the firmness of the ground beneath your feet as it is about dancing on molten brimstone. You have to do it every now and then, just to prove to yourself that you're still alive. The Derek playing here with The Ruins is not a man withdrawn at all, but one strangely at peace with himself amid the noise and flying metal.

KEVIN HOLLINGS

offenders. Sure, slow spinning on the Richard Francoix Hi-Vacuum axis was fun for a while, but there's only so many dead and always left to explore. Jessica Bailiff looks like she's found a way out. Releasing impromptu nursery rhyme melodies into clouds of phased smog, she asserts her benign howling presence in a solemn, pen-spoken voice, its slight helium inflections charging the spaceships with an endearingly chokey and naive air. Put together from demos with the help of various members of Low, Even In Silence is her debut recording.

Unsurprisingly, it's reminiscent of Low's dusk-til-dawn nostalgia, though Jessica's disc is sometimes heavier on the distortion. The sustained piano chords, guitar and samples

might easily be the jagged aesthetic of Flying Saucer Attack, but it goes deeper into the music's dark, alienated spaces.

If you're a musical astronaut, take for your own personal soundtrack: you'd do better to chase down the debut CD from Montreal (a tape case Colored Up You Black Emperor), whose obliquely, soft *Moon* is a stunning evocation of Kierkegaard's "end of the land sadnessness of the world gladness."

The album's sardonic fatalism is articulated at the outset by a word-weary Lee Harvey voice calling down the last days "We're trapped in the belly of this horrible machine and the machine is bleeding to death." The mood thus primed, the mostly instrumental *Godspeed* — bury it even deeper with

orchestral sweeps of melancholic wails and cello. With three guitar players sliding blues damaged sustain in and out of the mix, *Godspeed* creates some of the most emotionally charged instrumental music this side of *The Dirty Three*.

At times their orchestral parts evoke the *beatniks* doomed youth sensibility of *Music For Egon Schiele* by the string ensemble Rachel's At others, their way of raising powerful, blinding forces out of the nothingness into which they just as quickly reekle eddies parts of the first *Cul de Sac* album. Ultimately, though, *Godspeed* are out there somewhere, heading for some dark place that's there alone.

DAVID KEDAR

**Justin Bennett**

Cityscape

VALPARAISO ST01212 CD

Formerly a member of RMB Co, roughly described as a Dutch version of Bow Gamelan Ensemble, Justin Bennett now specializes in environmental recordings. This CD (plus CD-ROM track) draws on Bennett's various live radio broadcasts and installations — 25 urban soundscapes from Europe and North Africa are painstakingly stitched into a continuous 60 minute piece.

Bennett is a good example of Brian Eno's dictum that the artist is now a curator — he presents found sound with a minimum of intervention, apparently. But of course, the

concocted art is in the selection, the recording itself and the compilation. Anyone who's ever enjoyed the wind fluting the holes on a metal five bar gate, or how a creaking jetty imitates an electric guitar, will find plenty to occupy them here. Rhythm comes from dripping water, heavy machinery supplies the bass drone, and that eerie, low, harmonic flute effect, could that be the wind in a duct? Suddenly we're in the same position as the blind, analysing any sounds for what they can tell us.

Without a sure touch, the kind of recording can be as exciting as listening to paint dry. But Bennett's composing skills are superb. He leans to the poetic rather than the spectacular, and there are few shocks here. However the album has its moments of great vividness, like the investigation of different types of rain midway through. A sudden thunderous downpour in Paris is contrasted with softer, sensuous rain in The Hague: the drops tapping metal pots like a practising percussionist.

Bennett's trademark is the distant sound the Murrumbidgee church bells blurring to a coloured wash, the chanting in Tangers. It certainly clears out your ears — after this album, my neighbourhood sounded quite different.

**CLOSE SPILL**

Sir Richard Bishop

Salvador Kal  
ECONOMIST

The newly knighted Rick Bishop is the multi-instrumentalist/cantor in San City Gels—America's finest purveyors of 'ecstatic kinetic motions' and ethnic-tinged improv trance. That Bishop has spent a fair amount of time traveling the globe, jamming with the locals and sampling their best homegrown is readily apparent, for instance, in the way he effortlessly riffs out flamenco-fueled takes on mountain baladeering and one-caroline serenades.

Here alone on guitar, harmonium and piano Bishop fits perfectly with Reverent boss John Fahey's concept of American Primitive. He has so joyous and carefree a way of toying with notes, as he rattles off rounds of intricately picked sprigs, that you'd be forgiven for moaning out loud at his audacity.

But closer listening reveals just how intent Bishop is on wringing each piece dry, exposing the pathos and folk truth at the base of even the slightest elegy. The album's centrepiece is the 14-minute solo piano track "Al-Qur'as", which sees Bishop ebb in a sea of note clusters as he parts chords and rolls across the keys with wistful Moroccan fingers. Recumbent

DAVID KEENAN

### Cassiber/Ground Zero

Live in Tokyo  
RIN OGURA 2013

Cassidy have a theatrical approach to performance. Henry Goebbels's

collaborations with the late East Berlin playwright Heiner Müller have surely fed into his work with Chris Carter and Christoph Anders. The mix of sense of form is dramatic, alert to the dynamics of tension and release of comforting continuity and shock eruptions of sound. Live in Tokyo frequently resembles Rinde Eckert's music-theatre collaborations with Rüdiger Driesner, such as *Slow Fire*. Anders shares with Eckert a declaratory vocal style which lends itself to expressive music. The performance also recalls Goebbels's fine oration, *The Man in the Resistance*.

Of course, this concert recording has a less explicit narrative than is suggested by such analogies, but a literary input is established from the start when Anders intones the opening lines of Thomas Pynchon's novel *Gravity's Rainbow*. Casselberg were augmented for this 1992 Tokyo performance by alto saxophonist Shinoda Masami, recorded one month before his untimely death. His discreet presence does not significantly alter the character of the ensemble which is as precise and accomplished as ever.

Chris Cutler is magnificent, needless to say. For Cutler, a percussionist does not merely fulfil a motor function, but effectively orchestrates the group. He plays here with his usual unerring awareness of possibilities.

The accompanying disc constitutes the final Ground Zero album, and is also a release to savour. Osomo Yoshinide and his colleagues have sampled, reshaped and augmented the above Casser concert recording to produce a distinct, singularly impressive work.

A different set of rules applies in this second act, where Cassber's intensity is displaced by Ground Zero's cooler, more logical processes. Occasionally, Anders's declarations break the surface, but the remodel's most dramatic incident occurs when the Ground Zero grid cracks for an instant, and Cassber's uplifting instrumental version of Chic's "At Last I Am Free" seeps through.

JILLIAN CONWELL

### Club Off Chaos

The Change Of The Century  
DISQUES DU SOLEIL ET DE L'ACIER CD5A54098-02

**Damo Suzuki Band**

Vernissage

Now aged 60, Can drummer Jola Liebschütz shows no signs of slowing down. In the contrary, he releases every day, keeping himself in peak condition, always alert to new ideas. Club Off Phans his first group since the long debut *Chaos Band*, teams him with Boris Polonski on keyboards and Dirk Henkel on guitar. Though his legend has it that wary of analysing the heart and soul out of things, Liebschütz seems keenly on instinct, his new music ironically sounds like a close relation of that most calculated hybrid, intelligent Techno circa 1993. Perhaps *It's* pared down pulses constitutes the music's appeal for a man

whose love of skipping and streamlining rhythms is what kept Can on the straight and narrow through the early 70s, when they might just as easily have gone down the Prog rock route.

Liubezski's playing guarantees the Club Q/Chaos groove retains a human buoyancy even when it locks into the instrumental mesh of a track like "Numeros," which recalls the IT aloofness of #12, circa Time Tourné. At this stage it is too early to tell whether the project has legs strong enough for Liubezski to keep the groove supple beneath intelligent Techno's heavier load.

Liebeck was also a member of former Can vocalist Domo Suzub's group when they recorded *Vermisage* live in Linz in 1990. Matthias Kiehl on keyboards and Conink, Von Senger on guitar completed the line-up. Setting themselves musical parameters close to Can's Suzub's players mesh well in their semi-improvised explorations of musically telepathy. The problem is their smooth string/synth textures and bluesy guitar noodling are none too interesting. As an improvising force they just

don't have Can's visual alchemy. Of course, it's unfair to compare any project of ex-Can members now with the Can of then. But *Voyage* directly invites it with its centerpiece "Don't Forget Ya Job," a medley loosely based on "Hallelujah" and "Mushroom." However they still strike a few sparks, and as an improving singer Gismo remains a force to be reckoned with. But it is debatable whether they have sparks enough to keep firing through the seven CD box set of Suzuki live recordings rumored to be on the way.

## FAST FACTS

**Steve Coleman with The Council Of Balance & Five Elements**

Genesis & The Opening Of The Way  
 eric@vcd.com 74321529343 2910

Steve Coleman's busy, seamless music integrates divergent strands: the rocky horn lines of bebop tunes, the polyrhythmic cycles of African pop, the urban sensibility of blackstone soundtracks by JJ Johnson. TV cop show themes by Tom Scott, the traffic jam complexity of harmelodies. Coleman's sense of jazz welcomes styles which Wynton Marsalis neo-classicism reviles: free fusion and rap. He calls it M-Base. Two of the most striking musicians in jazz today — pianist Gen Allen and singer Cassandra Wilson — emerged from this backroom.

This new double CD is a manifesto. The cover features John Biggers' intricate painting of village life in Africa, portraying the numerical relationships between its gods, rituals and musical scales. In the sleeve-note Coleman talks of his studies of Yoruba, Hebrew, Sumerian and other mystic systems. Like Coleman's notes, John Biggers' beige and grey design comes across as a *Sakalifa*, educated version of concepts that with Sun Ra

## TONE CASUALTIES

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## Robert Williams

• **Dots With the Devil's Daughter** Iron Maiden's new studio recording with a colorful array of humanoid and electronic textures from the former drummer of Captain Beefheart and the Magic Band. Featuring musicians from Devo, Mothers of Invention, and other members of the Magic Band. *10/20/88*



100

**• Green Evil, Stray Particles**  
A collection of eleven masterpieces from the leading master of electronic bravado. This volume, #6 in the series of reissues, is an absolute essential for any series collector. One of the most mindblowing albums of the genre.  
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Summary

• **Glinda street**  
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**The Body Lovers**  
Number One Of Three

YOUNG GOD RECORDS/ATWISIC YOGA/ALP103 CD

**Swans**

**Swans Are Dead**

YOUNG GOD RECORDS/RELEASE YGCD012/698996 2XCD

Much to Michael Gira's annoyance, Swans — the group he fronted for 15 years — were always mistaken for a noise outfit. Yet despite the cynical, somewhat cruel stardom of Swans' guitar slum, coupled to Gira's psycho-erotic lyrics, their 'noise' remained pure and uncluttered. At their best, Swans had the grace and strength of an electronic symphony orchestra at full blast, a far cry from being just another deafening post-No Wave rock group from the slums of New York City. Out of the visor of their Heavy Metal armour, a blinding white light would eventually flash before the listener, illuminating Gira's message. All of which comes over loud and crystal clear on *Swans Are Dead*, a live double set that amounts to a near-perfect memorial to their powerful onstage presence. The set's 'White' CD is culled from a 1995 tour, while the 'Black' CD documents their swansong tour of 1997. Both have glorious moments, such as the 1995 version of "The Sound," which uncurls like a Havana cigar smoke trail before flaring into a towering inferno fueled and fanned by percussion and guitars. The Black disc's stunning songs and performances leave you gasping for oxygen, wondering why Gira clipped Swans' wings when the music was flying so high.

Lack of recognition and reward aside, the desire to do something different was probably his main reason. The Body Lovers' *Number One Of Three* is the first instalment of a 'psycho-ambient' soundtrack trilogy, where he is joined by guitarists Norman Westberg and James Plodkin, bassist Bill Bronson, Pan Sonic's Mika Vaino and the ever present Jarboe who, to the accompaniment of Bill Reilly, suddenly bursts into a bout of weeping at the beginning of the second track. This painful, shocking moment recalls "Doom A Sign" by Ivan Mantia, a piece constructed round the sob of a Romanian woman grieving for her long dead parents. A similar air of desperation haunts the Body Lovers'

Swansong: Michael Gira



track, until Gira's acoustic guitar solo effectively raises and redirects the mood.

Consisting of a floating pig's head, Body Lovers' artwork somehow connects with the slaughterhouse spectacles of Austrian performance artist Hermann Nitsch, whose Abreaction Theatre landed him in prison on charges of blasphemy and offending the public. Nitsch's performances incorporated blood, animal carcasses, fruit, fish, paint, Catholic ceremony and musicalist parade music, echoes of which ripple through the tightly flexed muscles of Gira's new music. As with Nitsch's ritual performance music, Gira's 'psycho-ambience' amasses a different kind of intensity to Swans' power plays, stacking sound and noise to overwhelm the listener in rich, dense, disorientating harmonies. At their core, Gira's heartbeats resounds ever louder.

**EDWIN POUNCEY**

were mindbending and garish. Unfortunately, a similar sense of reasonableness pervades the music, and in aesthetics reasonableness has the hollow ring of mediocrity.

You cannot fault the musicians. Planet Andy Hine is agile and intelligent; David Gilmore's guitar provides high spots; Maguel Zaver's congas sound great; towards the end of disc two Coleman plays some affecting alto. However, Coleman's compositional system is a barren grid. Initially attractive, the way that funk bass is woven with contrapuntal lines from horns and strings becomes arid. Coleman's mesh denies the players the chance to achieve the vocalised, gestural phrases that are the soul of jazz. Whereas Duke Ellington and Ornette Coleman united their collective musical events from the inside

out, his idea here a system generates across a jubilate. Billy Bang's 1984 masterpiece *The Fire From Within* remains the model for these seeking to embrace polyrhythmic pretentious with jazz expression.

**BOB WATSON**

**Cornelius**

*Tantastasia*  
PATOADOR 010/100 CD

**World Standard**

*Country Gazette*  
ASHKOD 0960 CD

The picture of Western life fed back through Japan's megatexts is looking increasingly

brighter and cooler than our own attempts to repackaging pop culture. Named after Roddy McDowell's age scientist in *Planet Of The Apes*, Cornelius is being touted as 'kitch pop' and 'Jap-Hop'. He fills stadiums in his native Japan, where he's an icon for Tokyo's bright young Shibuya kids. However, many tracks on this superb out-pop album sound like nothing so much as the post-Velvet riffs of My Bloody Valentine, spiced with The Beach Boys. In my book that's enough to raise Fontana's few notches higher than kitschological cool play. Stand out anthems are "New Music Machine" for its wire-out guitar riffs, jangling drums and soft-focus harmonies, and "Good" which tracks a gentle campy lyric with blazing choruses. Of course, it also has its

abundance of self-conscious pop cultural references, from 60s pop to Manga, but in all, *Fontana* is a sublimely deth pop baroque, with spacial jokes thrown in for Deleuzian isomers.

Another Japanese item of Western culture, bearing the disclaimer, "This is not a Country record", Country Gazette is a Harum Hozono production — a drifting, Ambient take on an American 'hobo traveller' theme with titles like "Country Sad Ballad Heart" and "1900 Hiss From Home". Turning the tables neatly on the West's tradition of colonial exotica (just as he did in his cycle of vinyl, Van Dyke Parks-like bananaland albums in the '70s), Hozono manages to rewrite Texas as an alien location, while unobtrusively establishing a few raggle Rags of his own through the American myths.

**NAT FRYTH**

**Farmers Manual**  
*Explorers\_We*

DE SLOTH 2XCD

Austrian soundscapers Farmers Manual have evaded a sound of such delicious intensity and refreshing originality that listeners are not so much staring on snowflakes as plunged into a state of total immersion. Few of their contemporaries are able to achieve such a sustained seduction. Pan Sonic and ELOH, perhaps, or even early Boyd Rice. If cerebral and/or is generally perceived as a defining characteristic of computer-generated sound, then Farmers Manual provide incontrovertible evidence to the contrary. Seeing them live recently I was struck by the tremendous physical presence of their sound.

*Explorers\_We* demands they can pull the same thing off in the studio. A single hour-long track is divided into 60 PQ start points and listening in shuffle mode is recommended. What emerges is a montage of fractured, febrile rhythms interlaced with bursts of searing noise and disembodied voices which fuse into a rich and radical sonology.

The first 1000 copies contain a second CD of live recordings, containing two lengthy pieces that further distill Farmers Manual's idiosyncratic methodology. Their throbbing pulsing, crackling structures are possessed of an intoxicating and at times almost incandescent power that translates to a creativity far in advance of the over-hyped doyens of new Electronic.

**JOHN EVERALL**

**Luc Ferrari**

*Più-Più*  
ALPIS MONTEBELL 07821 10 CD

**Luc Ferrari**

*Celidive 75*  
TAPAL 0210/100 CD

Despite his impeccable credentials, both as a co-founder with Pierre Schaeffer, Iannis

Xenakis and others, of the French Group de Recherches Musicales (GRM) in 1958, and as a composer of imaginative examples of musical concrete, electroacoustic music and environmental/ambient collage. Luc Ferrari has been reduced to a footnote in most electronic music history books—that is, if he is mentioned at all. Perhaps the reasons are more philosophical than musical. For one thing, unlike the other members of GRM and the rival Cologne Studio of Electronic Music, Ferrari was early on drawn to the indeterminant freedoms of John Cage, thus threatening the autonomy of the composer. Throughout his career, Ferrari has retained an emphatic anti-authoritarian stance, which may be the attitude most appreciated by similar iconoclasts: John Zorn and Jim O'Rourke, two of his biggest fans. Contrasts and conflict are at the centre of Ferrari's works, where concrete materials struggle against symbolic interpretation and where classical and popular styles tussle.

*Piano-Piano* is a rare look at Ferrari's music early and late, but in both instances without electronics. Four of the works pre-date his compositional studies with Olivier Messiaen and he works for GRM, and seem to be in search of a personality. Suite 1 (1952) plays around with the chromaticism and neo-classical design of Schoenberg and Hindemith, and Antonov, while not as nihilistic as the title suggests, is nevertheless a tag of war between harmonic and rhythmic elements including a machine-like regularity (with computer interludes) that anticipates certain Minimalist techniques. These restlessness tendencies reappear alongside folk-influenced material—not unlike the Minimalist/populist music of Cornelius Cardew a few years earlier—in both *Fragments d'un Journal Intime* (1980-82) and *Comme Une Fantôme Des Arrénisations* (1989-91).

Celeste 75 (1995) subtitled "Rhythmic Force And Cadence", actively borrows its instrumentation—piano, percussion and pre-recorded tape—from Stockhausen's classic *Kontakte*, composed 15 years earlier. But there is none of Stockhausen's post-war enervated angst and apocalyptic. The piano fits with Minimalist arrangements, interlocking tongue-in-groove patterns with the ethnic flavoured percussion, and slaps with seemingly random, aggressive gestures before the music dissolves into banality, accompanied by a tape strip rages from bird sounds and dogs barking to a distorted hyperchord.

Ferrari's mathematical and cellular constructions notwithstanding, it always feels like there's a human agency at work, allowing equally for dazzling columns of timbres and lapses in taste. *Piece Des Absences* (1977) puts Ferrari back on terra firma—a tape collage combining distortions of pre-recorded music (jazz, ethnic, 60s rock) with environmental sounds of a neighbourhood in Paris, where the sacred and profane mingle. The effect is of fluctuating sound images with an almost cinematic character: a musical documentary filtered through Ferrari's desires

and dreams. In both these works Ferrari acknowledges a studied unspecialisation of method and material, which gives them the unmistakable stamp of his own personality: witty and all.

ART LARGE

#### 4 Hero Two Pages

TAUON LOUD CD HC 204P

I've never been one for epics, and *Two Pages* isn't about to convince me of the merits of myth making, when Homer, Bessouf and Chanson de Roland have all talked before it. The cover—a Joseph Cornell box filled with photos suggesting a Sun-Earth-Moon mysticism—lets you know immediately what you're in for. *New Age* fusion that makes Maurice White's Egyptian look and sound like Johnny Rotten's anorexia.

Strings, harps, overly emotive vocals, beats that don't break, saccharine horn riffs: too uncouth to be played on Jazz FM make this the *Days Of Future Passed* or *Pictures At An Exhibition* for the millennium. One track reminds me of Starland Vocal Band's "Afternoon Delight". Maybe if these Fender Rhodes scholars dressed their shriek up in Imagination's lame and rhinestone outfits this might be more acceptable. But Diego McFarlane and Mark Mac are just too damned tasteful for that.

Thankfully *Two Pages* is an album of two halves. If the first one recounts a journey from Dolly Hill to a Garden of Eden in outer space via Roswell, New Mexico, page two is *Underground Resistance's* "Jupiter Jazz". As seen through Fox Mulder's telescope: Where the first half of the album concerns itself with love like "Hanging from the cosmic tree/O universal Jantzen", page two is the Techno-futurist episode of the con "3005" just might be the best fusion yet of Jungle's fossilic snares with galactic synth waxes and machine alteration.

The rest isn't quite as good, but it's a hell of a lot better than what came before it. I know that every polka-banded jazzbo under the sun is saying that it's going to take years for everyone to catch up with this record. That might be true of page two but 70 per cent of *Two Pages* sounds like Joe Sample circa 1982, and even Chris DeBurgh could make up ground on that.

PETER SHAPRO

#### Brian Gysin/Various Artists

From: Brian Gysin's Archives Vol 1  
949 8054 50112 292D

Allen Ginsberg  
Howl And Other Poems  
FANISMA FCD 7113 CD

Perhaps because the acolytes of Beat culture were always writing about where someone

had been or was tripping to—via junk, Greyhound or jet, via mythical autobiography, bebop, sexual fix, saton or dream diary—their legacy is composed more of rumours and photos, rather than genuinely lasting works. Obsessed as the beats were with reaching rock bottom, the naked man himself, the beat attention was always nervously twivling over the details of elsewhere.

The Tangers based artist Brian Gysin rediscovered the surrealists' cut-up technique in a Paris hotel when he accidentally cut through some newspapers. He introduced the cut-up method to his friend and collaborator William S Burroughs, and somewhat unfairly perhaps, he's better remembered for that chance moment than for his own art or writings. When he was dying he handed 23 reel-to-reel tapes to companion Ramonito "Mito"—much of it devoted to Burroughs but also including some of his own tape works, and recordings of traditional Moroccan musicians from the club he ran in Tangiers in the mid-50s called The 1001 Nights.

*One Night @ The 1001* comprises the first half of this testament to America's spiritual outstation in North Africa, with club recordings of various unnamed Sult musicians from Jaouaka—meandering solo meditations on voice or lute, sporadic, tightly reed sonnets, snatches of trance gatherings, cyclical chanting and veiled gyrals, all segued anonymously into one headtrip. Hard information on artists, dates and songs has been lost as a cloud of M. A letter from Paul Bowles to Mita in the sleeve notes explains that Bowles can't even help with info on when the club existed. So we must take our bearings from Gysin's own vision of Jaouaka as the last bastion of the rites of Rai, still celebrating the Roman Lupercalia under the cloak of Islam.

*Deloit*, the second half of this two CD set presents a deeper exploration of Gysin's vision of Rai in the Moroccan hills. A cut-up trance poem, part mystic rap, part sexual self-discovery, part visionary anthropology, it's a surreal incantation of birth, copulation and death—coining identity from "scarier birth in egg flesh" and "ape spring sound forces through pulsation". I've never sealed "the enclosed pieces of amoralistic gristle" but I'm sure its mind-expanding stuff. Mita has overlaid unlistenable but entrancing synth tones using a computer algorithm, shadowing Gysin's speech. The rest of the CD showcases Burroughsian free association narratives, junk cut-ups, and a visionary sexual ode to the city set in labyrinth of lockers and catwalks. What you take from it ultimately depends on what you bring under your skin.

The Gysin disc is a reissue of Fairley's 1959 recordings of "Howl" and "The Sunflower Sutra" taken live at the Shaw Festival, Chicago plus contemporaneous studio versions of such Ginsberg hits as "America" and "Kaddish Part 1". "Howl" is



## John Fahey

Requiza

WARGUARD VHD 23259 CD

## John Fahey

America

TADPOA TAD2003 CD

America was recorded in 1971. Intended as a double album, but shelved as a single LP. The CD release rescues previously jettisoned material, including the virtuosic "Oahart, Texas, 1967," which should elucidate for the uninitiated Fahey's legendary status as a six string acoustic guitar player.

But it is not mere manual dexterity that makes Fahey a figure of compelling interest beyond the blues and roots circle. Whether he is playing his own compositions, or a Skip James tune, or an adaptation of a symphonic movement by Dvorak, you cannot avoid hearing the instrument itself.

Fahey plays muscular music, worked from steel and wood. He has described himself as an American primitive. And so he is, in the sense that Albert Ayler was. Ayler would take a deceptively simple melody as the score for a gargantuan physical encounter with the tenor saxophone. His playing drew attention

insistently to that hard plastic reed. Fahey's sound is much cleaner, but like Ayler he is steeped in visceral domestic music. He manages even to perform "Amazing Grace" without jeopardising his integrity.

In 1970, Fahey published a book on his hero, Charley Patton, a bluesman whose earthy, guttural vocalising was pitched against emphatic, dancefloor guitar. Fahey doesn't venture to sing, and although he can handle foot-tapping rhythms with consummate ease, he is often drawn to more abstract forms.

This is most evident on *Requiza*, which first appeared in 1967. After a trio of characteristic down-home pieces comes the four-part "Requiem For Molly," which features Fahey playing repetitive guitar patterns against a mosaic of recorded sounds. Sources range from the Pizzopoli Delta to the Third Reich, by way of braying animals, grinding fairground organs and laughing children.

Some of the found sounds are slowed down, others are speeded up, but most just fall into sequence, further evidence of Fahey's devotion to the material properties of sound. The overall effect suggests aspects of Charles Ives or Van Dyke Parks, albeit without their epic aspirations. It also recalls Tex Avery, and conjures up the prospect of an affiliation to Fluxus, that most folksy and relentlessly concrete of avant garde movements. George Maciunas, the

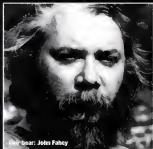


Photo: John Fahey

founder of Fluxus, proposed in 1962 that a concrete sound was "one that has close affinity to the sound producing material".

This returns us to Fahey's artisan-like approach to playing the guitar. *Requiza* concludes with a steady two minute rendering of "Fight On Christians, Fight On". Fahey, the American primitive, rolls up his shrills, and observes, "A hymn, as always, to end". That's marching in

JULIAN COWLEY

simultaneously the psychic map of Beat America and Ginsberg's reversion of Blakean poetics. The poem reads it as a barely reflected lunge, trembling with consciousness of its own timelessness as a historic cultural moment. It's essential listening for anyone wanting to catch some of the heat from the time.

Perhaps because of Ginsberg's capacity for ironic self-awareness in the midst of his transcendental paean to angel-hysteria-burns and denouncement of the urban Moloch, this seems less gawdily of its time than other Beat artifacts, though its mini-portraits of bohemian youth still present a lucid picture testament to the pangs of drugs, dreams, gay awakenings, madness, and panic in the face of 50s adulthood and the birth of consumer culture.

PIAT PITCH

## Goblin

Musica Composed, And Performed

By Goblin Volume II 1978-80

DISC MOVIES 13293 CD

Back in the early 80s an American critic dismissed the visionary talent horror movie director Dario Argento as "the rock Toccata of the hack-err-up people are carved up to the accompaniment of synthesized guitars maggoted to the twist on severed limbs, and for the grand finale heads burst through windows or sh-NO ~~~~~ Which kind of leaves you wondering what exactly his problem was. So closely were the visual excesses of Argento's films associated with the

over-theated baroque soundtracks supplied by Goblin - also known as The Goblines - that a critical attack upon one was often couched in terms of the other. Goblin it seemed were Satan's Prog rockers offering angular keyboard runs, churning mandolins, guitar solos, timpani and banks of synthesizers at a time when such indulgences were rapidly going out of fashion. Argento, who first used them in 1975 to score his blood-drenched psycho-sexual splatter fest, *Profondo Rosso*, had to be sensually deranged. You only need look at the saturated colours, hallucinogenic designs and the tripped out violence of his films to see that. The light, nightmarish spectre of the 60s had returned to drive us all insane. This was bad-trip psychedelia Italian-style.

Covering the early years of Goblin's career this selection of excerpts, rarities and previously unreleased material includes both *Profondo Rosso* and the unsettling, calm menace of their 1977 score for *Suspense*.

Unlike the previous volume, non-soundtrack recordings are also featured, and their work for major films like Romero's *Dawn Of The Dead* is neglected in favour of such genuine oddities as "Stunt Cars" from the 1979 cop drama *Squasho Anzognaristi*. The collection ends with some of the edgy, insistent electronic rhythms Goblin recorded for Lewis Coates's 1980 kick, *Contamination*, anticipating the stripped down disco stomps of their soundtrack for Argento's *Tendine* in 1982.

Mar. Satan Now where's Volume III?

KEN HOLLINGS

## Guillermo Gregorio

Elipses

WATOLOGY 511 CD

## The Grace Gräwe Quartet

Melodie Und Rhythmus

OKWAKS 001.2024 CD

## McPhee/Vandermark/Kessler

A Meeting in Chicago

OKWAKS 001.2016 CD

Three records with connections to Chicago's towering New Music underground.

Guillermo Gregorio acknowledges the influence of both Lenne Tristano and Morton Feldman, and his own elegant compositions testify to a remarkable cross-fertilisation from that combined lineage. This singular, translucent music is by no means merely derivative. Gregorio's saxophone and clarinet playing is a model of poise, and he receives sympathetic assistance on Elipses from Gere Coleman on bass clarinet, Carne Boio on vibes, Michael Cameron on bass and Jim O'Rourke, playing both acoustic guitar and accordion with remarkable restraint. Beautifully recorded and produced in Chicago by Art Lange, this music is buoyant but never lightweight.

Georg Gräwe and Gregorio collaborated in 1995. They have continued to develop along distinct lines, but the results are equally impressive. On *Melodie Und Rhythmus* Gräwe's quartet plays with the rhythmic intricacy one would expect from a group powered by Harried Drake and bassist Kent

Kessler, and its sophisticated melodic sense is extended through sinuous lines, evoked by the piano's remarkable fluency, and matched by Frank Griffo's agile and expressive clarinet and alto. The music is busy, but there is a lot of listening going on. It is a genuine group recording of rare attentiveness and responsiveness.

Kent Kessler seems to specialise in such alert collaborations. On *A Meeting In Chicago* he and reedman Ken Vandermark join Joe McPhee in creating a series of concentrated, beautifully shaped miniatures. Jon Corbett's elevennotes remark upon McPhee's ongoing outdoor status, even among free music enthusiasts, and properly suggest that this fine recording deserves further plaudits for his patient yet highly disciplined playing on trumpet and reeds. The range of techniques employed is as startling as the control with which they are used. The musicians gauge ferociously one instant, trace delicate designs the next, as they draw singular structures from the surrounding silence.

JULIAN COWLEY

## Jega

Spectrum  
PLANET M 30002 CD

## µ-Zig

Brace Yourself  
ASTRAVELOS ASW6235 CD

Spectrum is the debut album by 24 year old Marounan Dylan Nattam. It follows a

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Organized by the Society of Music and Sound in Film, The British Academy of Film and Television Arts, and the Society of Music and Sound in Film

smattering of 12" singles and compilation tracks on the local label Skam. Now Jaga is signed to the label run by Mike Paradinas, aka-Jaga, a friend and ex-fellow architecture student. His signing with Paradinas is not just an old pals act, however; musically, Spectrum has clear affinities with Paradinas's Lunatic Horsemen, Squaresquisher, and Armon Tobin's new CD *Perturbation*. More significantly, it is an authoritative, judicious debut.

The album's most bracing track, "Pribal" was taken from Jaga's "Type Xerox" EP, giving advance warning of the album's brutal aspects, but in reality the album's violence is confined to just a few tracks, and these are leavened with lighter material that is by turns proto-symphonic and inventively celebratory of club culture.

Label boss Paradinas is, of course, more readily associated with this genre than just about anyone else, with the possible exception of Aphex Twin. The title track of his "Brace Yourself" EP is a remix of "Brace Yourself Jazzer", the opening track of last year's killer album Lunatic Horsemen. The packaging here is a variation on the earlier disc's, suggesting these tracks originate from the same period and their high quality bears out the assumption. The EP's eight tracks might not reach the highs of Lunatic Horsemen — there's nothing here to match "Approaching Menace", for example — but there are no Lunatic lapses of judgment either.

TIM OWEN

## The Jesus And Mary Chain

Muska  
 CREATION CRE239 CD

The Jesus And Mary Chain have got good taste. They admire Link Wray and The Cramps, they find Test Department and Neubauten "too-faced", they want feedback madness, but don't see why such sonorities cannot be applied to a Beach Boys song or something. Eddie Cochran. The Electric Prunes. The Ramones are Alan Vega are never far away. "Degenerate" reverts the discordant rift of The Stooges' "TV Eye". So why is this album so deeply, deceptively dull?

"Maniaque" creepiness is today as collusive and bland as Hollywood film idiosyncrasy of adorning the music's odd-value weirdo debate corner moves with the star system, come on its industry-suited experts with advice for their famous colleagues. Voicing a personal reaction — the sole basis for genuine judgment — becomes anathema, the epitome of uncivil. So the press reception of *Muska* has been all about the Red brothers and their return to Creation Records after a four-year break, and speculation over whether they'll hit again replaces any objective assessment of the facts — like, does the fucker rock?

No said to say it does not, JAMC confuse rock with the pop narcotic of radio exposure. Feedback and power chords are

mixed into a blind, EQ-ed wall of sound. Whereas, say, the 60s psychedelia of The Electric Prunes trembled in an unstable ether of experimental distortion. *Muska* has been touched with the dead hand of radio's obnoxious production. In its raw state "Standards Remedy" might have kicked like The Undertones, but here every edge is muffled (and it's the sharp edge of the guitar in a Chuck Berry track, in "Sex Machine" and "Kiss" in The Fall and The Fire Engines and Kenny Process Team, that makes you jump out of your seat). Processed echo and close-miked vocals put a cool distance between the listener and the slight wobble riffs.

The rail in the coffin a few extra songs showcasing a more "human", less electric sound. The last gasp of rockers at the end of their tether is to pour sentiment into their three chord tracks, they can't do anything with these pinched harmonies and rhythms, so they repeat them as if their very limits can express frustration and alienation. It's the same old de sac as Minimalism. No wonder by the end they're singing "I hate rock, I'm not". Jaded pop stars? Bugger off and listen to some Derek And The Rumors.

BEN WATSON

**Mason Jones**  
 International Incident  
 CHANNEL MUSIC CDX CD

**David Kristian/Sian**  
 Tacoma Narrows Bridge/Someday  
 Anywhere  
 ALBUM AUKROO CD

**Masonna**  
 Frequency LSD  
 ALBUM AUKROO CD

Over the last six years US guitarist Mason Jones has been active on the Japanese Noise scene. Here are the highlights, tracks recorded on DAT with members of Zen Gwa, Mariner Bombers and Aube. Occasionally you miss the hi-fi presence of a Zaopa or Shannon Jackson guitar test, but grey hi-fi has its own ugly beauty. A duet with Joo Hoshigake shows the guitars taking emotional responsibility for their amplified excess; this allows the listener to endure the unendurable. Jones plays drums to Seichi Yamamoto's guitar and develops an entertainingly dogged tribal stomp. Jones's guitar is strappy and sloppy, but there's something heady and evoked about this music that is attractive.

David Kristian's Tacoma Narrows Bridge pinches six tone sculptures. Interpretation is suggested by photographs, icicle waterfalls, a spout from a cliff frozen into tiny tuks, bare rock with snow. It's a natural connection. In 1979 The Residents made a record called *Idem* about the cliff covered by whistling synths. Hands-on control saves Kristian's slowly evolving rumbles and peepings from

sedum. When some semblance of a chord arrives, it's as if seismic stress has blossomed forth in aerial song. Elegant enough, but within safely narrow parameters. Sian's *Someday Anywhere* has Shoji Kawaji and Akuma Nakama (aka Aube) improving on synths. Everything is pale and pretty and nothing matters very much. There's a predictable dramatic swell that doesn't fit the absent brief.

After the guitar in the mixer, the art. Masonna Miso Yamazaki screams and manipulates the results with effects boxes, compacting his nose designs into short sharp shocks. This mitigates the Hawaiian tendency endemic to Noise. The sound palette is bravely variegated and edited with a fantasia ear for surprise. It's as if the cavernous roars of 60s Stockhausen have been twisted into garish loops, the rushing effect of overhead speakers under day-to-day plastic earshell ornaments. Yamazaki is totally on top of his form and shooting forth sonic greggios of stunted beauty.

BEN WATSON

**Kreidler**  
 Appearance And The Park  
 KMF SYNTHS KMF11 CD/EP

Constitution-wise, post-rock is such a fragile thing: pools of silence, muffled rhythms, delicate wisps of electronics catching a weathery mood, time guitar parts needlessly going out in sensible solos for a stroll in the rain. As a genre it's so shy it would rather die than recognise its own existence, despite all the nice things said about it.

But post-rock's German cousin Kreidler were always more robust, always more prepared to get their hands dirty tinkering with the mechanics of the music. On their second album *Appearance And The Park* the follow up to their remarkable debut *Weekend*. Kreidler's obsession with detail can be overpowering. You can picture them peering the music together in a sound laboratory, learning with analogue junk and a mass of bare wires. But at its best all these bits of junk come to life like a Quasi Brothers animation. "Good Morning City" is a real novelty, a post-rock electronic polka, a series of intricate triplets and pauses choreographed quirky steps for anorexia. The dance motif continues with "She Wake Up And The World Had Changed", a wailing waltz not dissimilar to the retro-futurism of Broadcast. Elsewhere on "Cold", Kreidler resists Krautrock's hypothetical road movie with an atmosphere soundtrack. Licking back while keeping an eye on the road ahead, Kreidler are the sound of future perfect.

VERLIND PAVLE ILC

**Yungchen Lhamo**  
 Coming Home  
 REAL WORLD RW72 CD

Tibetan vocalist Yungchen Lhamo's first album, *Tibet, Tibet*, was almost entirely a

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LOOP CONSTRUCTION KIT  
ALL LOOPS = 133.3 BPM  
OIT

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LIVE RECORDED 1982 IN NYC  
EMERGE LAMOSCOPES  
12"

M BENSING FUNK BULLET  
A NOISE OF SOUNDS  
COMPOSITION FOR BULLET  
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COMPUTER GENERATED MUSIC  
GRAINWAVE SYNTHESIS  
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capella. This second outing, produced by Hector Zazou, places her warm, beautifully poised voice in a series of dreamy pop contexts, fluffy and delicate as a soufflé. Avoiding hefty rhythms, songs are driven by Kent Conrad's acoustic guitar or delicate loops, and Trojan hymns are suspended above oceanic drones and gongs. Richard Bourneau's gritty wail and David Rhodes' distorted guitar are used now and then to break up the blissful mood.

Zazou, who has worked with singers as diverse as Björk, Suzanne Vega, and Samkhö Nanchuk, is extremely good at this. I like his imagination — on "Veien" he brings in Finnish kantele zither player Timo Trossien and encourages the violinist to explore harmonies — and I like his nerve. "Ngak Pal Heng" espands Yangheer's voice through a harmonizer as if she was a HiHop diva.

Yangheer sounds a tad uncomfortable on the couple of occasions she ventures to sing in English, but her voice is an extraordinary instrument, and her phrasing is impeccable. Expressive within a clearly defined range, she doesn't do wailing or moaning, but always sings with a sad dignity.

The Real World label is making a specialty of packaging traditional singers in contemporary productions, for example Nurait Faten Al Khan and Ibrahim Idris Ousman. Thanks to Zazou's confident splashes of colour this is one of their more successful attempts. But the reason why records like this are ultimately lame is that they draw on a harsh, tracing world of strange, alien sound, and turn it into a soft and cuddly commercial product, as challenging as a baby pouffe.

CLIVE BELL

## Massacre

*Killing Time*

CHARLY COGNETS CD

## Bill Laswell

*Oscillations 2*

SUB ROSA SEVEN GROUP

*Killing Time* is one of those acknowledged classics of the New York No Wave era that few people have actually heard, despite its more conciliatory alliance of funk, post-punk, downtown ethos and oppositional Brechtian provocations: its retrospective pedigree precedes its budget price release. Originally formed in 1980 "at the request", it says in the sleeve notes, "of Peter Biskind", Fred Firth, Bill Laswell and Fred Maher, aka Massacre, recorded the album live for the ill-fated French independent label Celluloid in 1981. It is a unique, indispensable document that might now find a responsive audience, thanks to the resurgence of interest in avant-jazz, and Miles Davis's early '70s recordings in particular.

Fred Firth's involvement must have shocked the few Henry Cow fans who heard it on initial release. With scowling, scorching good humour, he plays a weird puny/funk/Petal

take on Improv abstraction that is the perfect response to Laswell's and Maher's mercurial rhythm tracks.

Thanks to the recent mini-avalanche of Laswell memorabilia, it's becoming ever easier to trace the development of his current cult status as proactive historian of *Alternative American Populism*. Laswell goes one step further than the handful of his peers who similarly seek to marshal the talents of others. But his motivations are not entirely altruistic: such projects feed his own abilities to operate in the present across the frontiers of sound.

*Oscillations 2* is an Ambient/drum 'n' bass hybrid, an automotive work in a heavily-mined vein of UK youth culture by a middle-aged avant-garde survivor, and why not? The likes of Wordsound do it with conviction, adding their own twists, and pay him all due reverence. But whereas Wordsound and their peers collectively feed Laswell's well-earned credibility, some of his own works seem merely to feed off it. *Oscillations 2* is a case in point. Which is fine — it's his creativity after all. But it engenders very little here. Laswell could cut stuff from the same cloth by the yard. He is good enough to get away with boy, unentwined programming because of his overall vision, and because of his great vocal vision. The best track, "El Hombre Invisible", almost forsakes drum 'n' bass entirely for 1.5 minutes of Ambient fretless bass noodling and delicate feedback programming. It's dedicated to WS Burroughs, naturally.

TIM OWEN

## Roy Montgomery

*And Now The Rain Sounds Like Life Is Falling Down Through It*

CRACKEN FISH CD/SAT CD

## Sandoz Lab Technicians

*Let Me Lose My Mind Gracefully*

CORPUS HERPES GROUP/HERPES CD 27 CD

## Victor Dimech Band

*My Name Is K*

REBORN/RECORD CD

## Rain

*Synchrome*

HYPERMUSIC CD/CD

*And Now The Rain* is the first solo outing in three years from guitarist Roy Montgomery formerly of New Zealand's legendary Pin Group and Dadamahi, and it's every bit as deeply and higher minded as you'd expect from one of the catalysts of the slow-burning, lo-fi rock improv underground. Combining fractured folk dissonance, swathes of pseudo-soundtrack psychedelia and lonesome raindrop piano it's only occasionally let down by Roy opening his trap to drone some monotone vocals, which somewhat disrupt the early morning fog feel of the music.

Sandoz Lab Technicians are a NZ freeplay trio who utilise reeds, bells and howling feedback in an attempt at mass liberation

Their third full-length release, *Let Me Lose My Mind Gracefully*, consists of a single massive track recorded last year at the Durand Project Art Gallery when they supported Tony Conrad. The acoustics of the gallery, which boasts a 60 foot high ceiling, account for the disc's cavernous feel, through which the trio's multidirectional wall drifts in a manner every bit as satisfying as *As I Am* at their most unchained.

Up to now Victor Dimech (band) were a smoke-shrouded South Island secret. They were the seminal jam collective who not only shared members with the aforementioned Pin Group, they also freed up dozens still-active NZ improvisors and in the process etched the blueprint for the future hazy sound of the scattered lo-fi tape community. With only one official release during their lifetime (a live track 12" on Flying Nun in 1982) it looked like their music would remain forever undocumented. Until now. This release, on original Dimech drummer Peter Stapleton's Medication label, couples the original 12" with ten primitively executed live tracks previously released through Bruce Russell's Xpressway cassette operation in 1988.

As a drummer, Stapleton's soft-pounding take on monotonous one to ffo Tucker's updated drum technique. Indeed, the group's initially tentative combination of loose, extended guitar interplay and subtle bass percussion — producing the kind of noise made by NYC-coated teens in the suburbs of the world — generates a similar atmosphere to that first Van-Velvet wisp of secret luminaries headed by the likes of Canada's Simply Saucer or Cleveland's Styrenes. Like every one-time *Pinot Machine* *Musci/Velvet* fan, these days Peter Stapleton plays totally free improv in basements like Flies Inside The Sun and Rain (basically Flies Inside The Sun minus guitarist Brian Crook), alongside fellow New Zealanders Danny Butt and Kim Peters. *Synchrome* couples the dead air aesthetic of MEV at their most spaced with the ring into the Velvets' "All Tomorrow's Parties". Kim Peters's vocal is more a whispered presence that merges with Stapleton's shrouded radio broadcasts and Burns' slight synth hum. The cumulative effect is a rapturous nod-of-the-world.

DAVID KEENAN

## Ben Neill

*Goldbug*

ANTILES 314551081 CD

## The Grassy Knoll

III

ANTILES 314551081 CD

Trumpeter Ben Neill offers a connection between LaMonte Young, with whom he studied, and the repetitions of *Electronica*. His last album, *Trypocal*, was disappointingly lightweight dance-trance fare, let down by weak drums and key synths. *Goldbug* is much more involving — Neill is now programming



lurms with weight and bite.

The spacier "Tunnel Vision", a punchy piece of artifice drum 'n' bass, is a real throbber. Neil's favored instrument (based on an instrument designed for him by Robert Hood) has developed to the point where, besides MIDI and sampling capabilities, it can even control a live-light show. As for what happens when he blows through it, it's a spacy, low-key approach he chooses; he unspools mildly melancholic lines over insistently repetitive backings. DJ Spooky guests here, though Neil's bright, clear sound is a long way from the congested soapiness favoured by the Subliminal One.

LaMonte Young's influence shows in the way Neil thinks about harmony — the rhythm programming apparently grows out of the harmonic ratios he's using, for example. Interesting, but irrelevant if the rhythms don't deliver the right kind of kick. The aim is to unite art and pop. Whether he finds an audience or falls between all available stools will be interesting to see.

Stranger by far is the third *Frederick and the Splinter Trio*. The quest is almost forgotten: second bassist Kent Kessler punch out a dozen tracks where improvisations and orchestrated single pieces go off with the same slightly funereal concentration. They're disciplined players, and they can all really play their instruments — odd that that perception should then turn in good stead.

The Vandermark Five — even though it also includes Williams and Kessler — sound less wound up, more spacious, and somehow more knowing than NRG. When they play a piece like "New Luggage", a dedication to Sheryl Nenne that's like a coldly affectionate nod to West Coast jazz, one wonders if Vandermark plays this stuff just to tip us off that he knows the jazz repertoire and that he can play that, too, if he wants. His writing is a composite of many traits: of new-jazz language, and if it hardly seems especially personal, he puts a spin on his groups which is startling to sound very particular. Rather than Zorn's quick-change obsessions, he measures his way without sacrificing any intensity. His saxophone playing — he dabbles in clarinets, but that's a sideline — is also pretty line level. If Williams matches him blow for blow! Consider the turning moment of "Super Opaqui". Vandermark's a natural trombonist, and he deserves following during his more interesting period.

WILL PHOTOGREPHY

## NRG Ensemble

Bigjazzto Gota A Facelift  
ASYNCRATIC ALPINE CD

## The Vandermark Five

Tangent On Flang  
ASYNCRATIC ALPINE CD

One way or another, Ken Vandermark has showed his way to the front in America's new jazz. Whether in DKW Collective, Steelwood Trio, The Vandermark Five or NRG Ensemble, he seems to be at the core of the current sound of Chicago. The albums have been flooding out

over the past year (a two), and it reminds me of David Murray's appearance in the mid-'70s records used to document a pilgrim's progress in the avant garde. Like Murray, Vandermark is something of a part-time radical, one can imagine him ending up as David has done, maybe doing Grateful Dead tributes, or guesting on homogeneous jazz dates. But his current elasticity is exhilarating to watch, and bear.

These are two fresh reports from the Vandermark bullpen. Longtime admirers of The NRG Ensemble — as it was in Hal Russell's day, may find its current incarnation too bullish, too much of a head-headed thing. Vandermark and fellow saxophonist Matt Williams certainly stoke some of the tracks up to a frazzle. But Brian Sanborn and Steve Hunt, as the multi-instrumentalist rhythm section, are a marvelous pair, and they sort of send a line to earth as well as introducing notes of fantasy (via trumpet and abseil) into what might have ended up as a pure-jazz outlet of the order of Crested Firebird or The Splinter Trio. The quest is almost forgotten: second bassist Kent Kessler punch out a dozen tracks where improvisations and orchestrated single pieces go off with the same slightly funereal concentration. They're disciplined players, and they can all really play their instruments — odd that that perception should then turn in good stead.

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REINHOLD COOK

## Philus

Tottra  
MAGNUS OILS CD

## Vainio/Väisänen/Vega

DeafBeats  
BLAST FURY MPTF147 CD

Two more faces of the versatile Mike Vainio. He describes his Philus persona as his "medical" project. I used to work in a medicine factory, working in a process of making



## Mix Master Mike

Anti-Theft Device  
ASYNCRATIC ALPINE CD

Tumbletime might be no less of a masturbatory fantasy than the Mach 1 machinist aerepos fogged on the world by the Gutter Institute of Technology, but if aae hocks like Steve Vai or Joe Satriani ever produced a record half as good as this, American men would still have hair extensions, and wear light zebra skin T-shirts instead of body piercings and baggy jeans. Perhaps not as hardcore as DJ Faust's recent *Man Or Myth?* album, *Anti-Theft Device* is Mix Master Mike's full-length debut still shows that, unlike the X-ecutioners, who seem to know what melody means, his idea of a well developed sound is Double Dee & Steinsiek's "Lesson 1: The Payback Mix". *Anti-Theft Device* is not necessarily a comment on the coming of the security state, but a warning to DJs not to bite his technique.

Nonetheless, there are some very clear stylistic antecedents to this album. *Anti-Theft Device* is not only part of HipHop's hallowed cut 'n' paste tradition, but also echoes earlier academic explorations of sound manipulation. That this other sounds like Pierre Henry with a beat is probably down to the fact that, Mike has taken on board some of producer, Aschford label boss and self-styled experimental guru Nauri Humon's sound library. Mike's scratch collages are made out of post-rock, basslines, static, hints of Martin Denny and Middle Eastern exotism, Ayler-like sax skronk and swarming drums, not just "Funky Drummer" and Grandmaster Flash.

Of course, there's Easy-E, Roxanne Shanté and Joe Tex as well, but tracks like "Government Secret" and "Can Of Ass Kicks" expand tumbletime's tonal palette beyond the usual sources, enabling the genre to juggle moods, not just beats. And when he does get stooped funky on cuts like "Supa Wyde Cakes" and "All Pro", Mike does it with such skill that he's still able to backdrop the steel wheels of your mind.

PETER SHAPIRO

cofractive capsules. Every day I had to put on the plastic gear, go through the air lock and get disinfected before entering the bright white production hall. A triple process of sterilisation and hygiene, and on Totra Vainio's trademark test signals and pulses emerge as 'disinfected' signs.

In fact, despite the intention to create an "ultra-neutral environment" there's an unexpectedly probing and eerie range of atmospheres across these 13 tracks, with names like "Vitamin A", "Anxietylytic" and

"Crescendit Jazzy". Rhythmic test signals gyrate with a molecular pose, xiphonic sounds interlace in hypnotically suspended loops. The best rest, and more flicks of audio presence alternate with moaning hums, percussive pulses and ambient hiss, all spaced with the delicacy and systems pose of Eros Music For Airports. A local world, clinically prepacked, but constantly alert.

From the 'neutral' to the testosterone-strung freedom comes from the unlikely combination of Vainio and Väisänen (two thirds of Pan

## soundcheck

Sonic) and Alan Vega (the vocal half of Suicidal). Putting vocals across Pan Sonic's harsh midsize pulses and burning drones seems a flex in itself: never mind Vega's brand of wretched-out, ranting psychosis. Part brain wave, part total-body grove, but in the Techno system Vega's voice shudders through the echo chamber with threats, capotes and taunts, rooping and wallowing in words like "lightstone," "vibes," "jeans" and "we live in rubble." None of this seems likely to spark off a rumble in a post-HipHop landscape, and yet Vega's sporadic effects of Elvis impersonation, all yells and wails and uh-huh-huh's — open up another facet to the Pan Sonic duo's digital chattering, motorbike riffs, handclap pulses and chopping synth rhythms, casting a bridge back to garage psych and the burning minimalism of The Velvet Underground.

**HATT MATTHEW**

### Steve Reich

Musica For 18 Musicians  
Nonesuch 755979448 CD

### John Adams

Christy Bottoms/John's Alleged  
Book Of Dances  
Nonesuch 755979465 CD

### Wim Mertens

Integer: Valor  
LPS DISQUES CD 008505137 THE 1052 CD

Edward Strickland defined the end of Minimalism proper as May 1974. By this point, all the foundations of the "bare bones" form had been laid and the composers were moving onto expanded new horizons. Steve Reich's *Musica For 18 Musicians*, written over the period 1974 to March 1975, confirms the diagnosis. Previously from 1971-74, Reich had been gradually moving away from the rigid, process-led Minimalist aesthetic, cooled in his 1969 essay *Musik As A Gravitational Process*, and demonstrated in such works as *Piano Phase* (1973) as *Six Stanzas* nuanced local styles while *Musik For Market Instruments*, *Voice And Organ* featured the exotic timbres uncovered in his studies of Balinese gamelan. With an expanded ensemble, including violin, cello, clarinet, piano, marimba, vibraphone and voice, Reich's confessed primary aim in *18* (as its title) was "to make beautiful music: about everything else."

He certainly succeeded, particularly in the 1996 recording. One of the most sensuous and alluring of all Reich's works, it's hard to deny the influence of his Gamelan studies when *Trag and Balinese* structures carry your ears. Yet ironically the structure of the piece bears the heaviest load of its influence with the vibraphone cues signaling transition in the manner of gamelan side drummers. Process governs this piece, even On the whole though, this is the sound of Reich biding Minimalism a fond farewell.

The Minimalist tag also fits uncomfortably on John Adams. Earlier works such as *Shaker*



Totally wired: Lee Perry

### Lee Perry

Produced And Directed By The Upsetter  
PRESSURE SOLIDUS P519 CD

### Lee Perry

Lee "Scratch" Perry Meets Bullwackee In  
Satan's Dub  
ROR BUREAU CD

### Impact Allstars

Forward The Bass: Dub From Randy's  
(1972-75)

BLOOD AND FIRE BM022 CD

A good dub track has a classical purity, to do with space and the careful shading of minimal elements. Without wanting to go all feng shui on you, the earthly perfection of dub can be like the slab of driftwood and the single flower in a Japanese tea ceremony, the juxtaposition of the rough and exquisite.

Check out, if you will, Lee Perry's dub of "Zion" by The Flames: the organ lurches, the bass massages your coccyx, there's Perry's trademark flanged hi-hat, and those hoarse backing vocalists dub hypnotised by the repetition ("Zion I love ya, I love ya Zion"). Perry creates magical space, and then into it places just one alien sound, a strange and gentle hammering, like someone tuning a table.

*Loops and Homophony* may fit the bill, but what of the later *Chamber Symphony or Violin Concerto*? Or indeed *Grady Butters*, a concerto for clarinet written in memory of Adams' father, who played the instrument in small New England swing bands during the Depression era. The sense of rural history is reflected in the unusual scoring, which includes bang mandolin, strings, reeds, piano and trombone. British clarinetist Michael Collins plays superbly throughout, his precise, exuberant tone rendering transparent the obvious stylistic challenges of the work, particularly the twisted melody line of the first movement, and the slow second, which

sounds like an impossible hybrid of Stravinsky and Gershwin.

The *Alleged* Dances, commissioned for The Kronos Quartet, are notable for the use of prepared piano: samples of which Adams organizes into micro rhythms. Some, such as the haunting finale *Two-Down of "Disjointed and Subtle Crotchet"* where musical strands are caw off at the legs, are gnarled rather than the like work itself. Taken together with *Grady Butters*, they show a man standing alone, not merely from Minimalism, but from just about every other modern composer.

Compared to Reich and Adams, Wim Mertens comes across somewhat like Debussy

There are plenty of moments like this on Roger Eagle's collection of 70s Perry tracks for the Pressure Sounds label, the sequel to their previous Perry release, *Woodstock*. The Upsetter himself wears an oh-my-god floral pattern tanktop on the cover, confirming once again the sartorial pre-eminence of the man who "makes all other clotheshorses look like ponies in a petting zoo" (*Grand Royal* magazine). This trawl of the Black Ark studio vaults yields ten songs by George Fath, King Burnett, The Hespines and others, alternated with their dub versions. Junior Murvin's hung-gilding *Isabella* soars through two more versions of his "Police And Thieves" hit: "False Teachings" and "Philistines On The Land". Stewed and delightful.

Satan's Dub goes straight into the bogus bin: it's largely a reissue of Perry's 1988 collaboration with Jamaican producer Bullwackee in Wackee's New Jersey studio, Satan Kicked The Bucket. Ho-hum synth reggae on drum machines and funny keyboards, and every tempo sounds just that bit too humdrum. Perry's occasional shamanistic babblings are welcome but inconsequential — by the final track he's chanting the alphabet. Most unwelcome is the decision to fly in corporate radio voices droning about "bank subsidies" and "major population centres". The exception is "Deh La La Dub", a mad carnival feature recorded by a human rhythm section at the resurrected Black Ark studio (Perry burned the original down in 1979).

*Forward The Bass* starts out with two versions of Augustus Pablo's 1972 hit, "Jawa". One features Tommy McCook on saxophone, the other foregrounds a grinding clavichord part to very odd effect. "Jawa" was an early production by the young Clive Chin, and this release adds five tracks to Chin's long unavailable *Randy's Dub* album. This is a harsher dub style tracks are dropped in and out of the mix, sometimes in an almost random fashion. Chin uses effects and echo far less than Perry or King Tubby, and the sound itself lacks Perry's magic sculpting.

But there's top quality Kingston instrumental artistry here — the rhythm tracks are excellent, two songs feature harmonica, and one has to go for winning high speed take "Ordinary Version Chapter 3" is great, consisting of an argument about the dub itself in dense dialect. The producer skips the mix and orders the incompetent engineer out of the studio, so he can demonstrate how things should be done: hence the album title, *Forward The Bass*.

**CLIVE BELL**

the 17th Century art that adorns the cover of *Integer*, Valor, the music within seems more influenced by the 19th Century Romantic tradition, especially when the sugary feel of the horns evokes the most sentimental exiles of the period. Some of the pieces carry that indescribable Peter Greenaway feel: will he ever shake that association? But the best and worst of worlds is connected with the lengthy, closing *Solomon*, which commences as American jazz music and dissolves into a cryptic-punctuated soundscape of dark belatedness and ambience. Minimalism of a different kind, certainly, but less is definitely more here.

**PETER PONTRETTI**

## Silver Apples

Silver Apples  
UNIVERSAL/CA/NO 11580 CD

A two-man combo based in New York, blending stamped drum vocals with the minimal pulsations of a customised, elegantly riled noise generator, who never get the snapp they deserved the first time around. It's too early to mention *Succubi*!

Silver Apples originally featured Simeon singing and accompanying himself on a sprawling homemade assemblage of oscillators, switches and dials, also called the Simeon, while Dan Taylor hammered away on a huge drum-kit, supplying the songs' rhythmic drive and fleshing out the sparse electronic melodies. Their first self-titled album was constructed on a primitive four-track machine in 1968 and released at a time when record companies still prominently featured the word 'Stereo' on their sleeves. Now digitally remastered for a reissue package comprising the first two Silver Apples LPs, it shines like a lost masterpiece of pop psychedelia, complete with candyfloss lyrics and an arresting vocal performance by Simeon, who sounds genuinely gripped by a strange passion whenever he opens his mouth.

Context: their 1969 release is a nihil and more immediately troubled affair, as revealed by the stabbing repetitions and anxious pleadings of its opening cut, "You and I". Perceive urban paranoia and the sounds of a dream gone horribly wrong echo through each track, heralding New York's No Wave by a decade, almost. The irony of the LP's title also says something in the throwaway bitterness of its closing number, which gives the unsettling impression that Simeon and Taylor have actually given up wondering whether anyone is out there listening to them. Which may well have been the case at the time.

"A flame is its own reflection," Simeon once sang back in 1968. Sometimes the present requires a little patience.

KEN HOLLINGS

## Spleen

Lullaby Scratchhead  
SWAMP PINKIE 50205 CD

Sleeped in misanthropy and regret, Spleen's second album takes the dark, cloak-and-dagger comedy of the Sisters Of Mercy and wraps it in the group's own entangled webs of downtrodden melodrama. Rather than going down the easy route of patchy, however Spleen take this stuff very seriously.

Conceptually, Lullie Scratchhead simulates the plight of the victim, through grey depictions of depravity, abuse and exploitation. The female narrator of "203" begins, "There are 203 bones in the human body, I have broken 202". As the piece unfolds, however, carnal laughter cues the black humour of the dialogue. Lullie Scratchhead takes much of its

troubling style from Spleen's strangely distorted viewing of trashy horror films like they were European art-house movies. Not unlike a zombie picture, "The Ozone Chorus Of Home" tracks each soul, exorcising movement through the thick midnight air.

The treated voices and drawing monologues of Rob Ellis (ex-PJ Harvey drummer) and Lou Coccolini (ex-God drummer, now in Piss!) give weight to the album's grisly themes. "Like A Watermelon", Coccolini's anecdotal biography of an unknown lover, is a graphic history of gore amid neon-lit city backstreets. "Sheets of blood blown below me! and my head started bubbling and spongy." The way Coccolini tells them, you can visualise him before the microphone, his head bowed, his face cringing into a slight, yet terrifying smile as he imagines listeners recoiling from the horrors he is describing.

YULIUS PAVLE ILIC

## Taku Sugimoto

Opposite  
HAT NOB 002 CD

## Buckethead

Colma  
CHRISTIANE COCCHI 330 CD

Japanese Minimalism has taken many forms at one and embracing Some Sakai's virtuosic orchestral Romanticism and Yasunao Tone's convulsive abuse of postmodern technologies at the other. Taku Sugimoto's CD of solos for acoustic and electric guitars is a set of sustained triangu beauty that invites a host of floating world clichés. A Zen proverb seems unavoidable, so let's keep it homey: "Taking a nap, I found the rice." Pianist Margaret Leng Tan took that saying for the title of an essay she wrote on John Cage. Neatly conveying the sense of surrendering conscious control while performing a vital task, it is peculiarly apt to the lull of Sugimoto's music. The guitarist creates an impression that he is releasing sounds from his instruments, allowing them to take form and hang suspended in acoustic space.

This is music that attains serenity beyond the example of Morton Feldman. It reaches a transcendent pose through the stillness of repetition. Clearly, there is a great skill and discipline involved, but it is an inversion of pyrotechnic performance. Here, there is no ostentation: no striving after effect. Opposite is the sound of Sugimoto listening.

Buckethead, on the other hand, pays a visit to a cemetery for his latest CD. Colma is named after a Californian city famed for its graveyards, and the guitarist, having soaked up the atmosphere of the place, seeks to transmit a little of it to us. Drummer Brian, a collaborator from the weightier days of Pines, acts as fellow guide to the necropolis, and Bill Laswell puts in a brief appearance. As an exercise in calculated perversity Colma succeeds very well.

Buckethead has left all trace of his work with John Zorn in the land of the living, and has entered a bizarrely pastoral underworld, sending back a soundtrack of rasping Easy Listening music. 13 tracks are listed, but they sound like drifting variations on a single formula that is ultimately monotonous. The temptation to deem symbolism in this is momentarily swerving. But there is no internal evidence to support a view that the CD's dedication to his Mom and Dad is ironic. They will surely love it. Other listeners can look on and marvel at the resilience of the American Sentimental, which refuses still to be led to rest. So taking a nap.

JULIAN COWLEY

## Surgeon

Balance  
TBESOR 7432156999 CD 2xLP

## The Weakener

What Do You Know About It?  
WORLDWIDE RECORDS/NOIS 502025 CD

The third album from Anthony Child, aka Surgeon, takes a more philosophical approach than his earlier releases. Child emerged from Birmingham's closely knit Downwards crew and the city's House Of God Techno parties. Balance signals a dynamic shift in his work. He has part-whitened from his presided Techno hearings, allowing a firm quality to show through on the better tracks. "Golden" evokes a House Runner ambience from its Michael Brook-like beginnings. His experimental tendencies make a brief return on "Dialogue", a cowering, soft focus plunge into avant garde Electronica. It's an accurate test, but there's scope for further tinkering within this quirky animated sphere.

Given the music's present orientations, there are still too many direction-directed sounds in evidence. Child magnificently believes that raw Techno has the power to operate on a listening level but it's extremely difficult to repeat the impact of Techno at club volume on the listener at home, where its unrelenting traphammer beats come across as numbingly monotonous. Much of the album becomes achingly specific once the initial head rush wears off.

The Weakener is the latest in a long line of Mick Harris projects — and he and Anthony Child have also begun working together as Certain Beyond All Reasonable Doubt. As The Weakener, Harris uses the offbeat breaks of his Scotch alter ego to create a devious dubstep ambience, synthesised from babbling Electronica, low-slung pseudo jazz and the odd art-house soundtrack. It is all very killing, if not Lull-like. Ambient unease is all very well, but when what's grating away at you is the poverty of its narrative, the effect is more irritating than unsettling. It's hard to find any purpose in the queasy manner.

YULIUS PAVLE ILIC

We are reasonable people. out June 29

# Various Artists

## Éthiopiques Volumes 1-4

BUDA MUSIC 82651/82652/82653/82654 4XCD

Combed from the archives of Ethiopia's Amha Records, the landmark *Éthiopiques* series reveals an enormously rich legacy of syncretic music, most of it unheard anywhere outside the Horn of Africa, though Mahmoud Ahmed (featured on Volume 3) and Aster Aweke have both had their moments in World Music's relatively tame sun-'Ours simply, this is breathtaking music that revels in the deceptively simple pleasures of discovery and freedom with an innocence that hasn't been heard on these shores since "Planet Rock."

Volume 1 is a collection of music recorded between 1969 and 1975, "the golden years of modern Ethiopian music" before the dictatorship and civil war brought the country to its knees. It kicks off with the amazingly sparse "Hedetch Adu," by the androgynously voiced Mulugetu Heltse. Containing lyrics like "I wish I were the earth in your courtyard, to shrill or least beneath your footprints," "Hedetch Adu" ranks alongside Martha & The Vandellas' "Nowhere To Run" as a perfect anxiety-ridden torchsong. Thankfully, though, the message in this music is not in the lyric sheet, but in the slightly asinine take on soul instrumentation: Mahmoud Ahmed's three contributors include a Farfisa organ stolen from The Hor-Kays, while the Soul Bros add a hint of Middle Eastern wailing to their arrangements for vocalist Seyfu Yohannes.

Although compiler Francis Falceto makes a lot of the transposition of the aggressive shikela vocal style to saxophones in his sleevebooks, the sax here sounds too bluesy not to have been copied from the American armed forces radio broadcasts which began in the 50s. With songs like Gelatchew Kassa's gorgeous "Tezeta SlowFast," though, this beautifully melancholic music provides a possible argument against the doom-sayers of American cultural imperialism.

Volume 2 collects music recorded in 1996 at Addis Ababa's numerous *amharibels*, or folk cabarets. The traditional music of the *amharibels*—based around lyres, bowed fiddles and percussion—has come back into vogue in Ethiopia, partly out of people's desire to reclaim cultural roots after decades of suffering under the repressive Derg. The music may be spare, but there are plenty of vocal flights of fancy: listen to Ethiopia answering Jamaica's cut of Hale Selassie on Adanesh Tekle's wonderful "Bob Marley," which not only mimics Marley's "Three Little Birds," but also namechecks Alan Shearer, Eric Cantona, Hristi Stochkov, George Weah, Michael Jackson, Aster Aweke, Bobby Brown and, er, Michael Bolton. The best tracks, though, are the pair closing Volume 2, which feature the electric *krar* (the Ethiopian lyre) and bear a passing resemblance to the interlocking



grooves of Mali's Wassoulou sound.

Volume 3 features jaw-dropping Afro-funk which sounds like it was recorded in a high school gym. Some of this has appeared on records from Crammed and Hermbal, and found its way into the crates of certain Hip-Hop producers who shall remain nameless (as has some of Volume 4). Mahmoud Ahmed's "Kululu Markwalish" is improvisation jazz that cuts any American practitioner of the genre, while Tahsoun Glesse's "Sema" is an Amharic "I Put A Spell On You" with an incredibly endearing New Orleans muted trumpet solo. Like the rest of this compilation, these two tracks have that Fela-like quality where the bad recording enhances the spiciness of the music. But it's the performances that stand out: Heri Beqele leading The Police Orchestra to the bridge like an Ethiopian Lyn Collins; and The Equators Band delivering the heavy heavy funk on Akmayehu Eshel's "Harasta."

Volume 4 focuses on instrumental music created by Mulatu Astatke in the late 60s and early '70s. Instrumental music is a rare commodity in Ethiopia, for Ethiopians, like most cultures surrounding the Red Sea, place a tremendous amount of importance on the Word. Unlike the rest of Africa, neither Cuban rumba nor jazz made any in-roads in Ethiopia, so the Latin horn flourishes, conga rhythms, George

Benson guitar riffs and Fender Rhodes licks further distanced Mulatu's music from the mainstream of Ethiopia's 3000 year old traditions. The end result of the music's singularity is immediately familiar, yet slightly strange, jazz funk, played by skilled musicians suddenly snared into an alien sound world teeming with new textures and patterns. There is no greater sound in the world than a musician newly discovering an effects pedal, so there's no shortage of outlandish soloing and riffing on Volume 4: perfect wah-wah riffs chop up "Yekait" and "Nitsanet"; bluesy fuzz guitar features heavily on "Yekermo Sew" and "Nitsanet"; and dig the Jimmy Smith organ transplant on "Yekello Tezeta." Like the music on Volume 3, the lo-fidelity and rawness of the recordings elevate Mulatu's arrangements above the uncaptious realm inhabited by Roy Ayers and Lonnie Liston Smith, who both cut their music from similar materials. But of course, it's not simply the circumstances of the recording that makes this stuff so great, as the final track, "Dewela," recorded in New York with Mongo Santamaria's group, proves. It's hard to place where the difference lies, but Mulatu's ear and timing are ever so slightly off-kilter. And as we all know, there are whole new sound galaxies to be found in sonic manure.

PETER SHAPIRO

## Amnon Tobin

Permutation

NRK TUNE 2010 CD201P

Last year's excellent *Further Mutations* CD on Lu featured a track by Cui, the name Amnon Tobin used to trade under. He followed its roiling fusion of jazz, percussion, piano and beats with his own, *Adventures in Form*, and a string of 12's that no one listed to on Naxos! Now operating under his own name on Naxos, he recorded a second album, *Blackdog*, and more insight, all of them pretty much ignored. Perhaps *Permutation* will and his run of anonymity I should bloody well hope so.

Tobin was born in Rio De Janeiro and has lived in Portugal, Madeira and Brighton, which possibly accounts for his stylistic blending of breakbeats, jazz and Latin influences. The jazz feel here probably stems from Tobin's own facility on sax and guitar, in addition to keyboards. It doesn't court on the sleeve, but I'd guess the sax contributions are his own. His biography makes clear the extent of his travel and experiences, which contribute to a far more diversified musical personality than that of many of his contemporaries.

On the first half of the disc, Tobin cruses the less frenetic end of the drill 'n' bass spectrum, while on the second he ventures further afield. Some of the juxtapositions are locally evocative of New York downtown jazz iconoclasts, whereas the trad jazz claret and percussion breakdown of "Swick" with its segue into the looping contrabass and chordal electronics of "People Like Frank." The whole enterprise, however, rests on the shifting sands of electronic evanescence and discomfitted breakbeat. "Fieri (Fader)" which begins as a laconic tribute to Eddie Palmieri, tumbles through whirls of ambient Merce Cunningham, before falling into some nouveau drum 'n' bass. A lightly dizzying cut, it typifies the pycnon spirit of Tobin's invention.

TIN OWEN

## Various Artists

Columbia-Princeton Electronic Music Centre 1961-1973

NEW WORLD RECORDS 805212 CD

## David Tudor

Rainforest Versions I & IV

MOSS 64 CD

Coming to the Columbia-Princeton Electronic Music Centre's works after so many years, it's impossible not to be affected by their pioneering compositions. The sound sources listed in the fascinating sleevelets provided by one of the seven featured composers, Alice Shields, hint at brave new worlds to come: oscillators! Phonograph! Microphones! And the music, notably Bülent Aris's *Postlude From Music For A Sacred Forest* (1961) sketches the era's utopian designs: no rhythms, no melodies, no electronics aging pre-existing instruments, just

sounds about sounds. Whether concrete or acoustic, it was about meta-sound.

But then the Electronic Music Centre did have plenty of reasons to blow its own trumpet. Established in 1959 by Vladimir Ussachevsky, an old Russian music classist who in 1951 had staged the first electronic music concert in the Western hemisphere, the EMC was a pioneering institution long before the idea of IRCAM gleamed in Pierre Boulez's eye. This was the original soundbite, where feigning capricious and fully matured ones, too. Milton Babbitt, Otto Luening and Roger Sessions were also onboard! could push the boundaries of music — using, if need be, computers the size of bus stations in order to do so. This collection of eight pieces — ranging from Aris's other-worldly sketches to Charles Dodge's rather lovely glass harmonica sounds on *Arches Magnetic Field* to two from Shields herself, featuring vocals in works heavily influenced by John Cage/Joan LaBarbara — may be for the therapists, but it's also an essential record of a specific moment of musical development.

As a pianist with a career-long association with Cage and Stockhausen, David Tudor knew well the soundworld that the EMC were intent on exploring. *Rainforest I & IV* (recorded in 1968 and 1973 respectively) show how far Cage had loosened the parameters. *Rainforest I* for live electronics by Tudor and Tachibana Kōsugi, shares characteristics with much of the EMC work, not only electronically speaking but more especially in its spatial design. Unsurprisingly, the piece was made for theatre: it was danced by Merce Cunningham's company in a set augmented by Andy Warhol's helium-filled cushions. Part IV is 51 minutes of dense, yet lush environmental electroacoustic music. And as for the missing versions? The second, with Cage's voice, was never recorded; and the third, on which Cage chanted from a Thoreau-inspired text, was for simultaneous performance only.

LOUISE GRAY

## Tom Waits

Soulsister Maladies The Island Years

ISLAND 542519 CD

As Tom Waits cranks himself up for the release of a new album on a new label — his first since 1993's *Black Rider*, a collection of songs from his operatic collaboration with director Robert Wilson and William S. Burroughs — here's something else to be going on with. Featuring 23 songs, *Soulsister Maladies* is a comprehensive selection of material from Waits's Island years. This relationship, which in 1983 yielded its first offspring, *Swordfishtrombones*, has produced some widening results over the years, and *Maladies* shows just how far Waits, the master of sardonic plays, has pushed his style. In the process developing a precise and poetic narrative language.

In fact, it's a galvanizing experience to realize just how far Waits has gone. While his earlier *Asylum* label albums — *Blue Valentine* and *Heartbreak And Vine* among them — remain classics of their kind, their modus was concentrated upon a melancholic barroom blues which, however potent the brew, never deviated from its central image of the singer in all his brooding presence, magnificence, even decrepitude. Maladies takes Waits's early persona as a given and moves on. It includes large chunks from *Swordfishtrombones* and *Raindogs*, songs from his stage shows *Frank's Wild Years* and *Black Rider*, and one song from his soundtrack to Jim Jarmusch's *Night On Earth*. If there's nothing here you cannot get elsewhere, the compilation does highlight how Waits expanded his range of sound possibilities with and after *Swordfishtrombones*. The danking (bainise percussion and dissonant harmonies of, say, "16 Shells From A Thirty-Digit-Six", or the nightmarish desolation of "Shore Leave", couldn't have been imagined earlier. Nor could you picture the extension of the theatrical landscape to embrace more than the singer alone. The *Black Rider* songs have an undeniably Will-like feel about them, even as their sets and sentiments lurch with an expressionist tilt. It's difficult to pull out exceptional tracks — *Maladies* has 23 of them.

LOUISE GRAY

## Jah Wobble

Umbra Sumus

30 HRRZ 304525 CD

Jah Wobble's transition from PIL, bass player to World Music libertine is almost but not entirely complete. *Umbra Sumus* finds him struggling to find a thread amid a clumosity of styles of the global music he attempts. The opening "I Jevodro II Oblacio" typifies much of the album, in that it allows us to witness Wobble trying to tap into a sub-ethnic area of music covered by other artists elsewhere with far more conviction. The poor production does the fragile walking of Amila Subramaniam no favours. Likewise, Natalie Atlas's contribution would have benefited from a modicum of understatement, leaving her and the music to find their own depth. Wobble's prosaic composition method seems to consist of juxtaposing incompatible 'ethnic', Western and electronic elements and hoping for the best. For "Umbra Sumus Part II" he tacks on a fit-fitting cazerza onto palatial orchestration, while "St Mary-Le-Bow" is an identity crisis masquerading as a sacred fusion of medieval harmonium and African roots music. The disc's one moment of welcome relief is "Chela", a polyphonic Balkan madrigal by Wile contributor Clive Bell — a pearl of simplicity in the vast, murky ocean of Wobble music. Perhaps he could teach his employer a thing or two.

YVES PAVLE LUC



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# in brief

Reviewed by Tom Ridge

**Air Traffic Controllers** *Women & Other Manic Groups* VULCO  
PARALOUS/RECORD CO.

**Our Classic Autechre**  
*Sequencer* CAPRA OBSCURA/CAMO 1 CO  
An improv guitar and drums duo, Air Traffic Controllers crackle and spark with energy. Gerard Cooley's guitar spits out fiery globules in place of riffs, and to avoid being struck by one, drummer Clare Pannell treelines some bafflingly unpredictable evading tactics. But more lively ATC are feeling their way towards each other, discovering how to riff together, building something new, only to knock it down and start it again in a different form. If Cooley's guitar sounds and textures originated in rock, you'd think I know it from the way he raves them off in loose, unpredictable bursts.

The Welsh duo Our Glasse Autechre derive more ordered drones, despite the occasional blustery passage. Unlike ATC, they've cottoned on to that, with a little control, they can burrow deeper, finally emerging at some distant extreme of experimentation. On "Insect Upon The Way," the guitar's white noise mutates a nerve-shattering assault on the senses, but once you surrender yourself to it, a strange kind of serenity takes hold. Nothing else on the disc comes close to its weird, wonderful alchemy, but that one alone is more than enough.

**Alternanuk** *Alternanuk* oua,  
JOINT WITH VISION CO.

**Pain Teens** *Pain Teens* CHERRY  
MUSIC/10 CO.

Unlike as it sounds, the Australian women's group Alternanuk have Aquia with thrillingly Greek without letting the seams show. "BKSMSN" (without sex code for "Barbie") Ken S.N.P.'s floaty vocals above a whole new subculture. Any takes for feminism? But Alternanuk's real strengths quickly dispense the surface froth. Their heavyweight low end rhythms determine the music's direction, not to mention its sometimes awkward, heaving gait. While bits of analogue noise occasionally rattle its equilibrium.

Ten years ago, Pain Teens used to be the adventurous — or so I thought. Hearing them issued today, reveals their shortcomings. Get used to the crunching splatter. "No!" — all relentless machine beats, metallic guitar and deadpan vociferous — and that's it. They've got nothing left to show you. Resolutely dark they may be, but deep shade doesn't automatically equate with depth or imagination. In essence, the music is as transparent as their titles. "World Of

## avant rock

Deconstruct... And the Rubble" come across as all too obvious now. Wonder why nobody saw it then.

**AMP Studio Synergy** *Monic For Meffits And Malcones* AMB AMANO 1 CO.

**Main** *Firmament* ILL BEGINS/BAQUET RECORD CO.

The prolific Richard Walker assumes his ever-mundane AMP identity whenever he feels like airing his abstract sonic drones. Recorded during the past year, the music's impressionistic beauty has much to recommend it, though it takes a fairly sure ear to distinguish this year's drones from those before it. The echo chamber effects on the title track bring it up to claustraphobic pitch, but the pallor of the rest seems to pall for AMP, too. The abstract drones don't so much resolve themselves as driftle into nothingness.

As for always, Main's Robert Hampson doesn't give a damn whether his drones resolve themselves or not. Firmament IV is more about eerie atmospheres, shock noise outbursts and weird cutaways than anything remotely resembling movement. Although the 11 tracks ooze into a single pool of music, it's neither clear nor calm enough to pass as Ambient. Amb-ient more like *Ali*, the familiar Hampson elements — low fluttering noise, droning machine whirrs and dramatic silences — conspire to disturb the mood. Now it's fourth volume, the Firmament series still hasn't run out of ways to catch you by surprise.

**Beans** *Portage* JAZZ RECORDS 21-2 CO.

**Oblietani** *Heavy Basses*  
*Infance* VIA VIDEOS/SCISSOR RECORD CO.  
The Beans have developed an appealing lightness by gently shifting melodies across languorous guitar rhythms. But that's not enough for them: they need to be seen with the bag boys, as textual experimentalists or whatever, so great they're happy to mess up their pretentious with all the drop-out samples and noises they can muster. With predictably damaging results. "Retail Romance" sounds like "Alibi-ore" coming over a car radio amid a pouring list of all drinking sounds. On their disc, they make their pretty if relatively ordinary post-rock any more interesting? Well, to these ears, they more striking odds are taken straight or they're all quantity.

Oblietani's disks are all over the place, running the gamut of angular pop. Free jazz. No Wave and polka. Yet against all the odds they've tracked a degree of coherence that binds most of their disparate styles into the

whole. That's not to say all their unlikely juxtapositions work. Avant garde shapes don't mould so readily into neat pop chunks. On "Nothing To Look At But Body Gossip" the Oblietani method compresses any number of songs into as dense as a black hole. When they're less bawdiest and more bebop, their experimental pop is more appealing for trying so hard.

**Buddah On The Moon** *The Last Autumn* DARY/DAVE WILKINSON  
KLA/EDEN RECORDS/EDEN/TOWNSHIP 1 CO.

**Alastair Galbraith** *Mirrorwork*  
DIFFERENT JONES 1232 CO.

Buddah On The Moon's folk-tinged space rock is far enough removed in time from its sources not to be too recognizably derivative. But how is this for a guess at their lineage? The Velvet Underground and Nick Drake traces aren't exactly indicative of inquiring spirits, even as it's difficult to fault their taste, or indeed, their finely judged playing. Like a less strident Magic Hour, Buddah On The Moon dwells in plaintive melodies shimmering with layers of reverberating guitar.

The 24 tracks on New Zealander Alastair Galbraith's album showcase an astonishing array of moods, textures and ideas in the 40 minutes playing time. The miniature masterpieces on Mirrorwork include strange complete songs like "High & Fired," the Syd Barrett-like "Throat" and the exuberantly fragile "Raining Here." Though principally guitar-based, Galbraith's skewed psychedelia takes in wails and babbles, while his treated voice communicates through snarl and tone more than words.

**Don Caballero** *What Burns*  
NEWBIE/RETURNS TRUCK/HQ CO. 10185

The opening track "Don Caballero 3" suggests the well-known group has found the key to release the locked form of multi-track. A bass and drums instrumental passage primes the pieces subtle mood, which is explored more fully by the strangely phased guitars. Nothing else comes close to matchings its evocation of mood: however impressive though it is, Damon Che's drumming is perhaps too insistent on following a straight line. The neo-Metal thing that so coloured their last album locks in briefly on track three, but most of the album is inventive and varied enough not to need Metal's weight. But in reality, the doc is too varied — is embracing ambiguity and the constantly lingering and shifting tones eventually induce isaster fatigue. Long before it's over, you feel like you're waiting for a child to wear itself out and go to bed.

**His Name Is Alive** *Fl Lake* 440  
CAMBODIA CO.

Two years on from the ambient but patchy *Sons On ESP*, His Name Is Alive finally deliver a more consistent collection of experimental

pop. This time their starting point is the soul and funk of the late 60s and early 70s. The deep snarls, bass and tact, chopping guitar of "Everything Takes Forever" recalls Detroit-era Sly Stone while "We'll Have A Whining Ring" is spattered with noisy wall-to-wall. However, His Name Is Alive's songs are too inventive formally speaking, to be dismissed as pastiche. Out of their indirect borrowings, they configure an air of originality that is theirs alone.

**Mekons** *Me Quarterback* QISS CO.  
The Mekons' jaunty tunes and harmonies can disguise the underlying tone of bleakness and alienation central to much of their later work. He is a dark record delivered with a lightness of touch that is almost whimsical. It sounds like they're overcompensating, apocryphal for getting too serious. Its central theme is sex-as-commodity, satisfying the desires of the ego, the Me of the title, through voyeurism. Yet the same Me is plagued by morose regret and hollow, macho bonding. The Mekons deliver the songs with a degree of enthusiasm if not subtlety. Band dance music for depressives.

**Pregnant Weep** *Hippod Weep*  
SWIMMING/RECORD CO.

If it weren't so heavily handed, Pregnant's satirical funk rock hybrid — part Arthur Lee, part Frank Zappa — might have been a welcome antipode to retrophilia. Aww, their failure of nerve means they feel the need to shout it out loud and then at some length. But what exactly are they shouting about? Nothing much, actually. Their songs ring with the hollow sound of their own laughter and no one else's.

**Vicious Artists** *A Tribute To Spacemen 3* BODICEY/SEA/SEA CO.

The outer limits end of Spacemen 3's music is reasonably reworked on Boddicey's *Artists* guitar-spattered title of "Call The Doctor." Low also do the subjects justice with the stark pleas of "Lord Can You Hear Me?" — a song that might have been written for them. Other interesting interpretations of Spacemen songs include Mogwai's triumphal stroll through "Honey," and Arab Strap's reworking of "Revolution."

**Robert Williams** *Dave With The Band* *The Damages* CHAS/RENAISSANCE

Something John Lydon said or did, a promise he never kept maybe, really got under former Beefheart drummer Robert Williams's skin. But whatever it was isn't revealed in Williams' rare PL parody "John Lydon," an exercise rendered redundant years ago by Lydon's own far more effective parodies of himself. However, it is the albums only talking point. Elsewhere, the mash of electronic funk, bad Metal guitar and stale gimmicky sounds like a third rate Bill Laswell album.



# in brief electronica

Reviewed by Rob Young

## John Berkovi Charm Hostel

POK! NE POK! 1206 CD 28LP

**Like A Time Yeah Right** (crist 6151003 CD)

A protégé of Cristian Vogel's Brighton-based No Future label, Justin Berkovi's immitate Electronica is still a mile too personalised for anyone from the outside to get a grip on. With a sleeve decorated with unity photos from his personal album, *Charm Hostel* is, as its name suggests, a place of surface pleasures that don't stick around too long. The rhythmic flourishes and eddies swirl around like exclusive toys, but don't emerge from the backwaters' atonality translates into impenetrable titling ("The Sunday Meliora"), "Slow Burning Jeopardy," "Ice Cream Conversation".

Rottenfist's Tom Van Leyden has released his first full length album on Alec Empires breakaway imprint Geat, but his debut has none of the attractions of the label's past two releases. Unlively, sexless, plausibly acoustic all hanging together on a general sense of dissatisfaction with the world as it is. Unnumbered by irony, his cover of ZZ Top's misbegotten "Lug" compares the picture of girlfriendless indifference. The beats are going to have to try harder if this isn't going to turn into the (weird blanket) generation.

## Boom Boom Satellites T

(Innovision/Auto Records) BBS RECORDS 1598111 CD

**Dr J Matsuoka The Structures Of**

BREATH (STUDIO RECORDS) STC 2006 CD

If Japanese Techno and drum 'n' bass has a problem, it's how its artists competently refine the forms rather than test them into new dimensions. The apparently named Boom Boom Satellites do a good job of heatbusting club-drenched Big Beat into an industrial Metal alloy that a million miles away from Meat Beat Manifesto (Jack Dangers contributes a remix of "A Moment Of Silence").

Dr Matsuoka's album for Osaka-based Stryke avoids the usual architecture of Oriental Techno — No U Turn is the model for the glibby breaks of "Crazy Twisted Dragon". Whatever the genre, Japanese producers tend to speed up ("Tanzon Funk" force-marches the pump-up motif through a gauntlet of double bass, clattering percussion and koto stabs).

## Caustic Window

WINDOW RECORDS 001 CD

Subject of much speculation: this one will elicit it actually come out? Are the track

artist really a sequence of ruder? Is this mystery a marketing prank concocted by Richard James and the Repulse label? No doubt, though, that these early and unreleased James tracks are the real McCoy. A mixture of dusty, clock-soaked breakbeats and clean Techno grooves recasting "We Are The Music Makers", these are the tunes that no doubt rocked the world of the party-faded Cornish youngsters in the clubs where James spent his formative DJ years. Get it if you find it.

## Doppler 20/20

KLANGHEIM/DEEMO (DEEMO) 001 CD

Named after Stockhausen's theory of the synaesthesia of sound and colour, Klangheime's material notably contains "Amien For Orchestra", a deconstruction of the most famous jungle breakbeat. DOOR boss Martin Lee-Stevens, aka Doppler 20/20, may be joyfully kicking smooles at the early electronic cockers, but his own music is as fresh sounding as anything else in the pile this month. Where so much UK Electronica can be wearily dusty and unfunny non-committal, his music tramples samples a host of sources and rids them of their beats "Bobby Bubble" flocks an Indian violin and kicks a Rastage undermouth a Phishy break. "Strong Up" yokes in some cinematic orchestral strains. "False Rate" finds his programming drum machines the way Jaki Leibeck plays on "Vitamin C".

## ECBOR Music Beaters

HARSCORD DISCOS 001 CD

**Bomb 20 Discographers Or Die!**

OUTR! HARSCORD (OUTR) NO NUMBER CD 12

OUTR pump up the blood pressure like no one else can be bothered to at the moment — not since Public Enemy's *N3t Jam* Ruff! The Show have nose and teeth been combined with such plan ferocity. ECBOR's Patric C. and Gina V'D'O don't give a dam for critical opinion, so saying they make the most engaged and radical sound in the month's batch — and probably the month to come. Frankly — is unlikely to go to their heads and deflect their path. Their nose is a dweeb, destructive, west, perfect gleaming music to play while a suit of intelligent body armour for 21st century essentialist soldier boys and girls. Strained on all sides by digital and radio interference, the sound packs down into stacked wedges of causal distortion, with Gina's hysterical songs wailed up somewhere within. Tansonic stuff.

Youth product cinema ads are already on the verge of assimilating the territory explored by Bomb 20 and I've signed

to DHR after he wrote them a letter accusing them of going soft. Burning with wistful fury, Bomb 20 lays down rapfire TV soundbites on the covering line for his shredded, tapered, grating breakbeats. Bomb's music mirrors the newswires that show sockets under going knife-edge transformations from order to social unrest.

## Echo Park The Revolution Of

EVERYDAY LIFE LO RECORDS 0001 CD

Echo Park is essentially London DJ Sayid and Lo Records boss Jon Eye constructing loops of rhythm and noise. A little help from friends ensures variety. U's Wilbo brings mucky brass on "The Sound Of Honey", and there's treated guitar from Seinfeld's Dan Seymour and Sarah Peacock. Plain's Robert Hampson and Thurston Moore. Fuzz bass and Latin percussion rule on "Moore's X", but "Air Vichin" provides a dedicated love with hyped, hip snacker blaring through the centre of the mix. Electronic key garancia runs not through this line set.

## Robert Göl

SEXSCROPE 0001 CD

How the ex-DAF drummer ended up recording at a studio in Birmingham and releasing records on a label like Disko B is anyone's guess. Still, his *Psychic Warnings Of Gaa-sy's* rolling House he's currently spooling out is some of the best of its kind popping, melting polymer sounds providing a buoy backdrop for pumping, floor thumping kicks. Strictly for consumption in a crowded public place.

## Moodman Killed By Bass

INNOVATION 001 CD

**Rei Harakami Unrest** (savage)

SEX 5011 CD 12

Moodman shadows the Tokyo underground music scene — he's a catalyst for any number of beyond-the-boundary noise, electronic and free-to-all releases, and *Killed By Bass* is no exception. The first tracks are a "Bass Connection" played by Magic Alex on Pete Pet's Bass Throbbles", Bassclotron 1 A Prime Minister of new new Heavy Bass? The Lady. As if this lunkadelic suite wasn't enough to raise curiosity, it's followed by Moodman's suite of mutant Electro grooves — Substos, Afro Hard Core, Da Bass Backline — unleashing some seriously heated musical mps, interspersed with the Moodman's own short, random bass frequency bursts. Weird.

Rei Harakami's Unrest won't kill you with its bass — in fact this surely clean Electronica is unlikely to contain any harmful bacteria. When the sharply sculpted percussion sounds are left to their own quiet devices, as on "Wreck", Techno takes on the meditative qualities of koto music, while the scabbling Latin beats on "Bass" usefully disrupt the record's dominating tranquility.

## Jori Halkkonen The Spurts

INFLAME RECORDS 13100921 CD 12

**Alex Martin Eventual Extreme**

INFLAME RECORDS 1400002 CD

Two similar sounding albums from opposite corners of Europe. Joni Halkkonen spoofs out cool Finnish House on his Lumis label, which also launches Garner's 5 Comm just fine, as he can trot out the kind of warm Sun Electronic chord-pads that for some reason get called "jazzy". That said, *Spurts* trades a nice line in rhythmic shufflers throughout.

Alex Martin leads a New Music ensemble in Barcelona, but has found time to record an album of warm blooded electronics, the highlights of which are the tightrope walk 909 rhythms of "Nomad".

## The Modernist Orange

COLORADO SLEY PHARMACEUTICALS 124088561 CD 12

**Dom Fackel Im Sturm** (HARVEST)

PS 10064 CD 12

Jong Burger aka The Modernist's primary coloured plastic mouldings are in danger of softening under the sun. With the flattened dynamics and vocoded voice of "Orange Coloured Sky" he could be making a bid for Aer's space, which always draws away from the usual electronic form.

If anything, Mike Ink's dry, rolling Techno dominates the Cologne skyline, much as the twin spires of the cathedral he's named himself after. "Fackel Im Sturm" spurs the rigour of his recent PS release on Proton, and whetters in a sampled vocal refrain to augment his Field vocal variations.

## Roland From Poland

BEATS MUSIC 1100000 CD

Staged as a Vangelike of a journey to the Baltic states by Bristolian Tim Taylor, this smalltime production is the aural equivalent of those ten minute handheld-video films the BBC uses to save money. Where most bedroom producers approximate industry standard quality, the mix on "Bait Beats" is refreshingly chaotic, even as the samples and found sound intrudes are finely integrated. The accompanying documentation of Poland's unexcited local radio and club underground is a revelation. A triumph of DIF ethics.

## Zultronick Bait To

BOOMERBATTISM PHARMACEUTICALS CD

This is the sound of the German suburbs. Fresh from remaking Wu Tang Clan, Zultronick paints an aural portrait of his land. Pharma Records boss Corn O'Neil's "Toad", the Berlin satellite town of Bornheimen. It leaves the fat Phog bass of the album's theme tune "The Holy Church Of Bait's", and the excellent "Sizzling Frog From Bornheimen", which lies up a splashing jazz beat alongside a metallic Electro KO refit.



# in brief classical

Reviewed by Andy Hamilton

## Jean Barraqué Complete

Works c.1955-66 3cds  
Barraqué was a near contemporary of leading modernist Pierre Boulez, but died little known in 1973. In the 50s they were rivals. But he got the Boulez disease — the inability to complete — much earlier. The result, captured in this three CD set by Klangforum Wien, is just seven finished works — other fragments aren't included. The music's violent energy betrays Barraqué's raw passion. One writer's recent description of "condensed sensist rigour and fractured 'febrile passion'" is wide of the mark. The Concerto features visceral clamour against a colourful combination including vibraphone and harpsichord. Most intriguing is the short tale *Étude Barraqué* produced during his time at Pierre Schoeller's studio, 1951-4 — lo-fi like Schoeller's own productions.

## Luciano Berio Rendering/Piano

Concerto II: *Edoardo Cuvio* n.c.  
0903988942 CD  
The Italian composer wrote *Rendering*, a homage to Schubert, in 1989-90, this is its second recording, with Berio himself conducting the London Symphony Orchestra. It, he says, "both orchestrates and reorchestrates" of Schubert's sketches for a Tenth Symphony, "but where the sketches stop I created a kind of musical concerto" — as in modern restorations of Goethe frescoes where missing portions are left as white instead of empty patches, the linking of a celeste mirror gaily, distant interludes, often loosely based on other Schubert material. The shimmering *Piano Concerto II: Edoardo Cuvio* has a piano part full of trills and rapidly repeated single notes. Compelling music by a modernist master.

## Paul Bowles Migratorius Lento

5131 CD  
The novelist and composer, born 1910, still lives in Tangier — the place where he ended up, which seemed as good as anywhere else — in inclusive isolation, finding off passing musicians and writers. Most of his musical compositions were written before the appearance of his first novel, *The Sheltering Sky*, in 1949 and the pieces in this chamber collection, with one exception, date from 1931-49. Bowles favoured French neo-classicism with a jazzy edge — light, witty and euphonious. Most impressive is the *Concerto For Two Pianos, Winds And Percussion*. But if Bowles wasn't a major novelist it's doubtful his music would endure.

## Daniel Goode Tunnel Flannel

TDAC 777729 CD  
Mark Dresser Banquet 1200K 120207 CD  
Daniel Goode, who studied with such luminaries as Henry Cowell and Pauline Oliveros, runs the Electronic Music Studio at Rutgers University and co-directs The Downtown Ensemble. But this recording is by The Craxlow Ensemble, with unusual instrumentation featuring four flutes and four trombones. There's an affinity with Morton Feldman's more energised late orchestral pieces, and the result is very appealing. "Fiddle Studies" is an engaging tribute to Louis Scott's folk music.

Long time. Brian and Sam associate Mark Dresser wrote *Banquet* for flute virtuoso Matthias Ziegler. Each movement focuses on a different flute — bass, contrabass and alto — with Dresser on string bass with a string quartet. Ziegler conjures astonishing sounds, especially on bass flute — sometimes like an amazingly mobile New Orleans brass bass. "Loss Of The Innocents", a concluding nine minute piece, is a lament for the victims of TWA Flight 800 featuring the combination of clarinet (played by Chris Speed), cello and flute. Dresser is developing a striking compositional voice, and both discs from Sam's discerning "lookalike" are highly recommended.

## Icebreaker Rogue's Gallery new

1246 013305 177002 CD

## Minnesota Contemporary

Ensemble 180 Degrees From Ordinary n.c.w. 513 CD

Icebreaker began in 1989, "a band of English composers who wrote operas about their work. They wanted contemporary music with bells" that must explain the all-time compositional line-up — though I guess they don't have bells: either — of Michael Torke, David Lang and Big Daddy Louis Andriessen, with a live recording of "Hokius" Steve Partland's power to class solidarity, "Shoulder To Shoulder", gets a new, more individualistic arrangement by John Godfrey, possibly reflecting the death of anything remotely like socialism. The album is a good example of Icebreaker's work, but I find their Minimalist class rhythms insidiously rather than fun.

The Minnesota Contemporary Ensemble has a similar ethos, combining the artistry of a chamber orchestra with the attitude of a post-punk rock group, they say. Maybe their audiences share the illusion. The programme is more varied than Icebreaker's, but they ought to do better than employ a saxophone with the lobby, blaring tone of

the classical academy. The string quartet version of Astor Piazzolla's "Solo, For Tango" is less polished and more mechanical than the Kronos recording, but things pick up with Zappa's "The Black Page".

## Seth Josel Go Chitarra 20 discs 9996

CD  
Electric guitarist, Josel has collaborated with Louis Andriessen, Lohfense Young and James Tenney, and the presence of the last two is felt here. Tenney's pretty, chamber-like "Sequel" for electric guitar and bass opens the disc. On Phil Niblock's 30 minute "Guitar Too, For Soon", the Lohfense Young influence means you soon feel those step down transformers coming on. More obviously varied are Josel's own "Solitude Seasons I And II" — despite the titles, they are ferocious studies in feedback.

## Masaoka Orchestra What Is

The Difference Between Stripping And Playing The Violin?

VIOLIN CD

What is the Difference? — won Sam Preston's Top Seven Transcendent Moments in Music in San Francisco Weekly, it says here. Masaoka's 16 piece "inter-cultural, electronic, friendly inter-media orchestra" features jazz trombonist George Lewis, plus input from dance and former sex worker Daisy Anarchy (hence the title — no, don't ask). Out of the anarchy and violence emerge fine playing by Lewis and snatches of beautiful big band sonorities.

## C Newman Compasses content

UNRECORDED CD

## Anna Lindal Violin Alone content

SAKRO 103 CD

Since the 70s, the legendary name of C Newman sometimes Chris Newman, has surfaced above the musical horizon in ICA concerts and small label recordings like this one. Does he really exist, or is the music, "an elaborate ploy"? Composition "is my attempt to combine everything with everything else, even the already combined". Newman drowns "through these combinations [his piece] creates a very low level of musical meaning". Leading Swedish violinist Anna Lindal and pianist Henrik Lovenmark sustain a very low level of composition and meaning for a long time — as in Cage's later studies. More superficial than hypnotic, the bleasty attractive music, as some crass set of five finger exercises, at least makes a kind of possibility.

The John Cage School dominates. Anna Lindal's solo disc, with two pieces by Christian Wolff, two by the Zester himself, and a brief Cage tribute by the great Hungarian composer György Kurtág. But though the spirit of C Newman threatens to seep into the slower pieces, there's some good material — especially Christian Wolff's free variations on the Labour movement song "The Death Of Mother Jones", which

gets a first recording here. The disc closes with one of Cage's late "Number" pieces, the 24 minute *One10* — just single tones of natural harmonics, no melodies. Recommended.

## Michael Nyman Movements

For A Monument To The Loneliness Of The World n.c.w.

0274074 CD

## Michael Nyman String Quartet

No 6/Three Quartets n.c.w.

724355657408 CD

Yes, that's Michael Nyman — the Danish branch of the family, maybe. For Nyman, born 1963, "Writing an hour long work for piano in an age when sensation seeking risks media: create a breakneck tempo in cultural life" could be said to be a rather hapless prayer. Well, the tag labels may not be good, but Nyman has produced a sensual, expressive and often violent suite of pieces. The Messian favour sacrobo through his father's Tostan Mural. The last movement, "Decomposition", is monumentally bleak. Well worth exploring.

For some reason, our own Michael is a feature in the column. The Nyman production line rolls on with an EPT disc of the long-4th *String Quartet*. It's written in memory of his revered composition teacher Alan Bush, who he told, went to his first Nyman concert and left during the interval, distressed by what he heard. (Based on a solo waltz piece written — of course, for Yury Yamaoka's autumn fashion show in Paris, there are a couple of nice folky tunes, but these get fugged to death like all the others).

## Stephen Raab Murders In The

Rose Morgue n.c.w. 2056 CD

Not to be confused with the British label MHC, MHC is Massachusetts based. Raab teaches at Hingham University. His 21 minute "electronic opera in one act" is based on Edgar Allan Poe's story. But Raab is better when his essentially light, frothy style is in over-laden with serious matter. Pieces for harp and tape, and marimba and tape are diverting. Most of effects without much rationale. Not a name to look out for.

## Stefano Scodanibbio Voyage

That Never Ended NEW AKB004111 CD

"I haven't heard better double bass playing than Scodanibbio's. I think everyone who heard him was amazed," said John Cage. The Italian bassist and composer, born 1956 dramatically defended his instrument's technique by working with Xenakis, Luigi Nono and Terry Riley. Voyage for solo bass is music of small gestures, when a mostly narrow dynamic range and a steady pulse. Points of comparison are a solo bass album by jazz players such as Boris Phillips and Mark Dresser, though Scodanibbio doesn't have their rhythmic flexibility. *Voyage* must, that repays repeated listening. □

# in brief outer limits

Reviewed by Matt Iffche

## Thomas Dimuzio Headlock

101 CD  
izoviet\*france: Mort Aux  
Vaches Feedback SHAMPAINE NO  
NUMBERS CD

Groining, oscillating and convoluting its way through electric guitar, samplers, loops and tape samples, *Headlock*, originally released in 1989, takes traces of rock feedback, cut-up Impres and scratches of environmental recording, and then twists them with the digital circuitry of avant Electronic. Dimuzio bears comparison with DJ Spooky in his grasp of some futurism, but where Spooky's work thrives on dub — the delays and recalls of personal consciousness — this is clean edged and floating, a music of high-speed patterns, trains and generators. If King Crimson had studied under Edgard Varese.

Another in the series of *Mort Aux Vaches* live recordings for Dutch radio, *Feedback* stems from '96 — a lengthy single piece normally marked into tracks — opening with a warm, undulating Moog sequence that reminds me of early Tangerine Dream or Cluster, all blurry, bubbly sound with a humming force and pulsing wails and whines of feedback. It's habitually set up a ground level of muffled resonance over which tone colours are added like passing vehicles. Their music has rarely been described as psychedelic, but there is a kind of textural drifting here — gliding, fading, tiny ripples, faint burrs and clanging bells, as well as sharper pulses of sound over astral music electronic beatings.

## Disinformation R&D

101 CD  
R&D sounds like Panasonic or Rylee leads but these eight tracks are recorded live from interference on radio frequencies — the dynamic hum of the 13 minute opener — "Turf" of hums from the SOFEL fundamental reduced by alternating current electricity, modified live using an upper-lower feedback filter, and Boss PS-2 digital pitch shifter. Other numbered track rogue frequencies include by electrical storms or Network South East, from barely-entire to hi-probes and on "Data Storm 2" a single grating undulating signal, to the cyber roar of the "Type 2 HF solar radio emission". Large scale events captured as changing micro-sounds.

## Erinxma Sphere Of Magnetick

101 CD  
Tensendale LAZZI STAGGLO 2 LP  
Two LPs from Cologne's Stagglad label Bristol duo Enema have returned from similar

Ambient/global trance flicks and more experimental shores. Side one of *Sphere* is less engaging, trance with an Oriental tinge using synth and Jews harp, and including a lengthy Madonna-esque incantation to primal beginnings. The other side comes on stronger, with a range of invented sounds — a rummage round mixed objects with ripples and gongs. Avant chant out Peter Schaefer, as Tensendale, fills one side of his LP with "Luzifer" — an undulating and lowering chord reminiscent of the cult to Twin Peaks. Born drawn to such lengths, it remains a mesmeric overtone of uneasy yearning, which darkens two thirds of the way through when he blends in strains of a baby crying. "Luzifer III" on the flip denotes a harsher, brighter chord, Pauline Otero's style, letting the timbres sharpen and fade.

## László Hortobágyi Szumma

Techno/ogiasz 101 CD CASUALTIES RECORDS

## BP Service Self Acting

Techno/ogiasz 101 CD CASUALTIES RECORDS

Tone Casualties are comingling the field in gothic/ambient Electronic, yet few of the CDs I've heard have really stood out from the general post-industrial atmospheric mainstream. Strange times are happening in Budapest's department of "Technomusicology". According to the sleeve notes, each track on *Szsumma* Theologer stages a language colloquium of conceptual yet lines that would make Ian Sinclair peer his pants. "Tremorology" boasts input from the final consciousness of the Corps de Woodoo Ballet. "The rhythmic form of the MC Eusebio's vinyl". Other namechecks include Huey, Wino and Peter Ernst. Full marks for the conceptualism. Musically a sense of black rites, cyber Techno and Talmic angst finds expression in grand guignol industrial dance music, synthesizers with a hollow, brassy feel, tribal rhythms, bells, kildes and elements of funk. I wanted to get into this as *Hortobágyi* sounds an interesting guy — learned in the mathematical systems of ancient Indian music, and contemporary computer lore. However, much of it sounds like Goth pop, despite its thrilling sampling of mutant voices, Hindu chants and on one track "Atrials singing human song".

BP Service are a Hungarian industrial group based in America. BP Szabo Gyorgy plays metal handbells, factory noises, iron stencils and electronic noise generators. Kosa Vince is on rhythm constructions, atmospherics and noise vibrations, and Koko on sound drifts and vocal waves. Again the packaging is a step ahead of the music — an

automated/digital electro-pop feel with repetitive loops, unhinged machine rhythms and a range of sinister industrial sounds, enlivened with some offset colours. An ideal *Microplastic* soundtrack.

## In The Nursery Lingua

101 CD CORPORATION CD

## Alquimia A Separated Reality

MUSICA CINERCA CD

Two supposedly minimalist universes that are disappointingly familiar. Billed as mysterious "phenomenal" women into the "universal language" of *In The Nursery*'s music, the translations as lyrics in other languages (French, Yugoslavian — DK, and Malay) layered over brothers Kive and Nigel Humbertson's incredibly TV soundtrack synth music, big on string sounds and pliant car angles, at its least adventuresome this is as otherworldly as "Nights In White Stare".

Alquimia's Separate Reality is based on Carlos Castaneda's Mexican shamanic trip of the same title. Again this is a far less 'out' than it might be, certainly less so than her live performances, which have a grand space orchestra feel. Aztec solar poems, dub refracted lyrics, dipping and diving electronic sounds, and occasionally the operatic, summing terror of a *Homocore* soundtrack — but the synthesized grooves can't shake off a hint of staid tropes.

## Roberto Musci Debris Of A Look

101 CD

## Vinna Mahedi Ensemble

101 CD

## Raksha Mancham Sitar Yul

101 CD

Three ethnic adventures, the first two from Milan's Roberto Musci. Originally released in 1984, *Debris Of A Look* blends guitars, sampler, Indian and African percussion, flutes, sennors and the like in a driving ethnic trance. The title refers to voodoo deities, but the strangely sequenced rhythms over warm drones, with ones, chanting, whooping electronic swells and so on are unlikely to steal your spirit now. For the *Vinna Mahedi* project, Musci is joined by five other compatriots in a kind of ethno-WFH. Oblique experimental interfaces on guitars, samplers and percussion.

Belgium based Raksha Mancham offer harvest festivals, dionysiac dances and wedding feasts in remote Tibetan towns, which makes their heavily reverbbed all-purpose global funk-lunk at the more disappointing, even if proceeds do go to the Tibetan Youth Congress.

## The Residents Meet The

Residents 101 CD

## Negativland Happy Heroes

101 CD

The Residents with Louisiana's answer to Frank Zappa. Their first album, released in 1973, bears all the Zappa trademarks. The

Mothers' dyspeptic take on R&B, down to the world trash voices and lyrics like "Smelly tongues looked just as they felt", the crosscuts of doo-wop, waltz-wha guitar and hokey jazz. Lumbering bluesy piano rascals like a lo-fi Pat Martino, along with trumpets and clannets, burning psycho-rock licks. Goenrich music hall snippets and psychedelic electronic squalls. The harsh production retains the feel of a gully gang project rather than a career doodling. A catchy blend of the homespun and the aware guards it still sounds infectious.

You can't get the same for Negativland's long-running *Knockout* project combining media prattle and high school sci-fi. Advancing the dubious product *Plenty* — it "makes up your mind" — *Happy Heroes* collages outtakes from *Green Giant*, peak, KFC, and Orion Wells for showing over "crumb-coat cooking" in a Fandus commercial, into a ramshackle background of paratroopers and heekles compered by Eddy Lee. A morose inferno.

## The Story Of Personal

Electronics The Story Of

Personal Electroculture 101 CD

## Ashtray Navigations Four

Raga Moods Ashtray Navigations 101 CD

DRIVERS NO NUMBER CD

The sleeve to *The Story Of Personal Electronics* shows 24 icons, one for each track, of familiar international signs. Slow drive, fan man, woman, cigarette. These three minute snippets showcase a range of abrasively mixed and treated electronic sounds in aridly frequencies. A sample track begins as a fast tapered, picks up distortion, cuts to a purer, warbling isolation, then to a grating distorted reverberation, to finely honed bleeps, and finally a fragment of bleached and distorted funk. Each is a superb miniature odyssey in abruptly spliced sound, recalling the Pigeo label's art in the mixage it gets out of aggravated electronics. However, the speed and range of its shifts bring it closer, perhaps, to Spontaneous Music Ensemble. Track 23 provides a lengthier 30 minute exercise in ring-modulated bliss.

The Food's solo project Ashtray Navigations uses the principles of a raga to sustain lengthily, collaged, to-it electronic atmospheres utilising Moog guitar, dulciphone, toy harmonium, iron, TV, etc. The opening track is the key, managing to sustain the attention over 41 minutes. It starts with a simple harmonium drone and a background ambience of clattering, accidentally brushed guitar and objects, wail scrapes and scratches of indiscriminate conversation. This all blend into an extended to-it meditative mantra culminating in a harrier break-out. An ease in blending acoustic sound and noise give it a burnished unpretentious appeal. A tracklist aside to LaPorte Young. ( )

# the compiler

New compilations, reviewed, rated and reviled

For institutional reasons connected with Brian being 'the land without music,' London hasn't been a centre for electronic composition. But today affordable technology opens the doors of the electroacoustic academy to all comers, even Cockneys. **Variations 2** — **A London Compilation** (Paradigm PD 05 CD) is a strangely cohesive and compelling set of soundfield explorations. It includes Paradigm producer/composer Givie Graham's quavering industrial excavations, Alexey Ilyin's conspiring crush of breaking eggshells and clattering ballbearings, Hugh Davies's vesuvius harp melodies, and Ralf Gehlhaar's simulations of antique tape music, among others.

Of course, every sub culture descended from industrial, rap and HipHop has effectively been making music: concrete out of loops, samples and found sounds, even if they didn't know it was called that. Like Bristol's Dope Dragon producers, they look odd and take names later. The DJ producers of **Dope Dragon Presents The Combustion EP** (Dope Dragon DDRAGO 019 CD) 2x12 instant by

shattering Strauss's Thus Spach Zarathustrer and go on to teach drum 'n' bass producers a thing or two about creating tension by adding layer upon layer to the drum break to devastating effect.

Still in its infancy, American Jungle gets by on its exuberance and that's the rule on **The United States Of Drum And Bass** (Exit Team Records ETR1 0008 CDLP), any sense of urban dread and attention Armageddon is copied directly from their British cousins. This is a very fine compilation of Yank drum 'n' bass that shifts the focus from the media centre on the two coasts to where the real American breakbeat action takes place — the Midwest and Maryland.

**Endlessession** (1004 04 LP/CD) works like Chinese whoppers: 16 artists embark on a never ending race where a single track is 'formed by each artist in succession,' utilizing at least one element from the tape passed to them. It achieves a startling unity of style and direction. The likes of Bedouin Accent, Endemic Wave, Nonplace Urban Field and Funki Parano, in a field of unknown runners, are among those

relying the track down the line.

As **We Are Reasonable People** (Warp WAP100 CD/LP) testifies, there's seldom much fluff on any issue from the Warp health farm: here celebrating a century of singles. A collaboration between Alexey Tim and Squarespace, set up as the label's birthday treat, falls marginally short of their exacting standards, but the usual suspects — Boards Of Canada, Broadcast, Plaid, Autzche, Nightmares On Wax, Jim Tenor, Red Snapper, Andrew Weatherall and two Lone Swordsman, and Mark Bait, plus recent signings Phone and Pina Colá — attest to the efficacy of Warp's strict regime.

You don't have to stay away from Atlanta, Georgia's **Ice Cream Festival** (All Gold No Number CD) to keep fit. Anyone entering this intentional improv pool burns calories at a furious rate. Enlivening its event, The Shaking Ray Lewis don't let us in 11 flumm minutes of noisy, violent and brainwailing playing. Local boys Gold Sparkle Band, LaDonna Smith and Davey Williams also feature. Those who haven't read the papers in a good long while, take note: the Charles Parker and William Carlos Williams featured here are groups. Their namesakes are dead.

Some folks round the same parts are damn difficult. **One, Two And Three** (All Gold No Number CD) is an Atlanta improv summit presented as a traditional contest. Organizer

Rob Mallard believes you get more mileage out of improvising if you set them screaming rather than engaging in dialogue. Like surrealism: this is an ideology of control and proscription, not liberation. Still, the music itself is intriguing, grouped in sets of three, the second and third reacting to events in the first.

After all that heat, the 13 tracks comprising **Rites** (Real World RW69 CD) will either cool the brow or chill the blood, depending on your attitude to the kind of anarchic One World digital fusion that is the Real World label's stock-in-trade. Either way, it's hard to resist such elemental forces as Sheela Chandra, U-Smivnes, Georgia's Tanandah Choir or the late Nasir Fatah Ali Khan, regardless of the context.

Chinese whispers and running reels seem to be the order of the day. **Harmonie** (Einsy Einsy 008001 CD), a compilation by a Canadian artist specialising in electroacoustic music, takes us back to 'Go, Lovers, Go!' by Dariusz Kania: an ever-widening continuum of artificial and natural sounds. 'Talking Barn' by Hildegarde Westerkamp is a pleasant evocation of rain sounds, but could equally belong in a breads and incense shop. Giorgio Manganelli's 'Seine' is used, chided, Muttering samples and quickly darts. Label boss Andrew Cank and Susan Frykberg are also represented. (J.) Reviewed by Andy Hornbott, Tony Hornbott, Tim Owen, Peter Shapiro and Barry Withersden

## Label distributors & contacts

This column lists labels featured in this month's Soundcheck. The listed label is followed by its UK distributor. Where a label has no named UK distributor, a direct contact is given. Labels not named here should be available from specialist retailers such as Depth Charge. Periodically, Rough Trade, These etc. In emergencies, contact key distributors such as Cargo, Greyhound, Harmonia Mundi, Impetus, Kudus, Pinnacle, Rikl, Sheffield, SRD, These, Vital, etc. NB Labels and distributors if you spot an incorrect or missing listing in this column, please contact: The Wire pronto

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**Aim** E PD Box 666 Staten R Montreal Quebec H2S 3L1 Canada  
**All Gold** PD Box 8776 Atlanta Georgia 31106 USA  
**Amelies** through PolyGram  
**Asa International** through These, Kudus/Pinnacle  
**Aqueduct** through SRD  
**Astralwerks** through Caroline  
**Azavide** through SRD  
**Atomic Holograms** through Harmonia Mundi  
**Begonia Records** through VIVA  
**Betty Weinman's Careful Drivers** e-mail: b01000@comcast.net  
**Black First** through Vast  
**Blood And Fire** through Graceland  
**EPGICA Victor** through BMG  
**Budo Records** through Occident  
**Camera Obscura** Web: www.cameraobscura.com  
**Causal Tendencies** tel: 001 213 463 8709  
**Certificate 18** through SRD  
**Clarity** through Koch International  
**Claremont House** PD Box 170277 San Francisco CA 95137 USA  
**Coexist** tel: 00 45 33 28 01 72  
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**Croatian** through Vast  
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**Digital Hardcore** through Vital  
**Okoto** H through SRD  
**Drugs** H through SRD  
**Drugs: No Synthesis** through Impetus  
**Dupe Dragon** tel: 00 33 3 83 32 30 47  
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**Got It** through Kudus/Pinnacle  
**GRG Records** through New Note/Pinnacle  
**Broken Box** through Cargo  
**Dead Power** PD Box 283 Thelma Beach QLD 4318 Australia  
**Emery** tel: 021 604 5 94 9256  
**Echo** through Pinnacle  
**EMI** FR tel: 01  
**Emperor Jones** through SRD  
**Eure Ralgh** through Cargo  
**Exit Team** tel: 001 212 337 0706  
**Exile** through These  
**Fat Cat** through Vast  
**F Communications** through Vast  
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**Harmonia Mundi** through SRD  
**Hot Now** through Harmonia Mundi  
**Hatology** through Harmonia Mundi  
**Inferno** through Cadillac Impetus These  
**Ischa Band** through SRD

**Innova** 322 Monmouth St Suite E-145 St Paul MN 55101 1300 USA  
**Island** through PolyGram  
**ITM Corporation** through EPM  
**JEFF SPURLES** through Vast  
**Krinsky** through Cargo  
**Largo** through Harmonia Mundi  
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**Lo Recordings** through SRD  
**Lowlands** tel: 00 32 3 226 1527  
**Mander** through Vast  
**Mediations** through Cargo  
**Meteoric** through Cargo  
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**Muscle through Harmonia Mundi**  
**Phonetic Wire** tel: 00 81 3 3450 8811  
**Phonetic Services** via APP Box 777 London WCTN 505  
**Network** tel: 00 49 45 36 87 99  
**New Albion** through Harmonia Mundi  
**New Note** through Impetus  
**New World** through Harmonia Mundi  
**New Time** through Vast  
**Novoskitch** through MSA  
**Oblique** through Harmonia Mundi  
**OD Obscure** tel: 001 203 333 0603  
**Or** through These, Kudus/Pinnacle  
**Pak** through Vast  
**Paradigm** through These  
**Paradise** 341 Lafayette St Suite 4155 New York NY 10014 USA  
**Parasol** through Harmonia Mundi  
**Pharm** through SRD  
**Planet** tel: 001 313 965 4227  
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**Play It Again Sam** through Vast  
**Petrich** through Harmonia Mundi  
**Prozac Sound** through SRD  
**Prisoners** tel: 00 33 2 40 73 31 80

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**RCA** through BMG  
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**Rectangle** tel: 00 31 1 40 33 95 37  
**Reptile** through Vast  
**Rikl** through Rikl Recommended  
**Revenant** through Cargo  
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**Wordsound** through SRD  
**Wolffert** Anheuser 50 Queensway Hurley Minnesota Minnesota 55920  
**Al Recordings** through Vast  
**Young God/Anheuser**  
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# multi media

Rahma Khazam visits the Dutch electronic music foundation STEIM

A studio in central Amsterdam on a balmy May evening. On a podium at the far end of the room, Frances-Mare Uitto coaxes otherworldly notes from a cello. At the other end of the studio, Michel Waisewitz is winching and tensing in his chair, generating a rich palette of electronic sounds as he accompanies her on the small multi-sensor keyboards attached to his hands. Getting up and walking over to Uitto, he samples her playing with the small computer on his back, while bringing the hands (the literal name for the keyboard devices) right up to her instrument so as to pick up its slightest murmur. Then plays Uitto back to herself, modifying, distorting and magnifying her dream, plaintive swoosh.

Electronic play-polyety it may be, but at STEIM the radical electronic music research centre in Amsterdam, compelling performances such as these are the result of years of research aimed at injecting the energy and theatricality of the concert stage into the rational, studio-bound world of electronic music. Ever since the first thirteen demonstrations in the 20s, attempts have been made to incorporate physical gestures into performances of electronic music, but most of these efforts have been ignored by the mainstream electronic music milieu. "Electronic music is the only music that seems to have risen to maturity without a performance practice," says STEIM's artistic project supervisor, Joel Ryan, a former student of two electronic music pioneers Robert Ashley and David Behrman. "That could explain why it hasn't had a very wide audience because it's difficult for people to relate to music that doesn't have something like the rituals and sensuality of performed music. The justification for that is probably the highly rational state of modern art music, where writing is the essential issue and musicians are just intermediaries."

As Europe's only electronic music centre dedicated to live performance, STEIM's attitude contrasts with that of other centres such as Paris-based IRCAM, which encourages the specialisation of composers, performers and technicians. Fusing these roles has always been at the heart of STEIM's approach.

The idea for STEIM was planted in the mid-60s. Concerned that composers working with computers had little, if any, direct contact with the machines themselves, Italian composer

Bruno Maderna suggested to a group of Dutch composers, including Louis Andriessen and Dick Raaijmakers, that they start a workshop for musicians to gain hands-on experience of electronics. In response they set up the government-funded STEIM Foundation. Its brief was to give musicians access to the technology and know-how of electronic instruments.

Today, its ten-strong staff includes education and project advisors, two software designers and an instrument maker. In recent years specialists have been developing and marketing electronic devices for composer-performers. Michel Waisewitz, the foundation's director since the early 80s, comments: "Composition is great, but you can't just isolate yourself from the concert stage. At STEIM we started to develop equipment which provides immediate contact with the musical material so that you can compose on stage."

The Luk Machine, for instance, is the only sequencer to

record, assign and process MIDI data live. It not only records live sounds, but unlike traditional samplers, it is capable of playing them back and processing many layers simultaneously. One of STEIM's most popular products, the Baglye, is a video-to-MIDI interface that runs on a standard Macintosh computer and can detect and track differently coloured objects and translate their images into sounds.

The development of state of the art software is not the only aspect of STEIM's work. It also creates custom-built instruments for all kinds of musicians, offering them research residences, and assistance with software and instrument design. Drawing on new developments in fields as diverse as medical science and geophysics, STEIM's inventors adapt electronic instruments to the physical and musical capabilities of their user. Their hardware has little in common with the mass-produced tools used by most

Electronica musicians and VJs

"Technology is not an abstract objective, it's very personal," remarks Waisewitz. "At STEIM the idea was to create a toolbox, because to create personal instruments completely from scratch is very difficult." The brains of STEIM's toolbox is the SensorLab, a small computer that can convert analogue information supplied by a variety of sensors — visual, ultrasound, movement and touch — into MIDI data. "The programming of the SensorLab is crucial," Waisewitz emphasises. "Because that's where you design the relationship between the gestures and the music. People can play with it and decide in which direction they want to go, and we'll help them."

Waisewitz himself has led the way in the design of exotic, personalised instruments. Apart from the Hands, he has also developed the Web, a structure of interconnected sensors activated by moving a finger across it, enabling the musician to trigger intricate combinations of electronic sounds in an intuitive way. The steady flow of notes passing through STEIM have put a novel slant on these ideas. The SensorLab, for instance, perform on a giant version of the Web, triggering sounds by climbing over it. Likewise, STEIM's Imagine program for manipulating visual source material in real time is the cornerstone of Japanese composer

Saguru Goto's interactive media music project. Body movements picked up by a range of sensors are translated into sound and video images. Indeed, the wide-ranging facilities and expertise that STEIM offers its visiting artists have turned it into a

breeding ground for a new race of virtuoso electronic music performers, among them Kierke Matthews, DJ Spooky, Jon Rose and Bob Ostteng.

Thrilling as it may be, such a rollcall of visitors suggests STEIM is likely to remain a laboratory for a handful of avant-garde experimentalists. Indeed, is there a demand for new instruments with more user-friendly man-machine interfaces? An increasing number of musicians might be flocking to STEIM, but the music world won't change overnight. Michel Waisewitz is the first to admit it. "Even the Techno people say you should have your own little, old-fashioned mixer and turntables," he laments, "even though it could be done in a much easier way." □ STEIM e-mail: steim@ed.nl Website: <http://www.steim.nl>



You need Hands: Michel Waisewitz

## GO TO:



### Brainwashed

www.brainwashed.com

Brainwashed is a storehouse of sses, devoted to the musical loves of American Jon Whitney. The difference between this and most fan sites, though, is that Whitney codes like a pro — even if he does still do it unpaid — and many of the sses have become all but official. A slick black intro page leads you straight to the artist list, which centres on the post-industrial diaspora as it bleeds in with US post-rock and downtempo beat junk. Aural 15 Throbbing Gristle, Cabaret Voltaire, Current 93, Cor, Diamanda Galas, Non-Meat Beat Manifesto, Orgnum, Tortoise, Luke Voort and more, each with its own discrete layout and identity. The 16 sses are a good example, with full discography, sound samples, and cover artwork from their myriad releases. Additionally, the Aes Archive which adorns the site has been installed as a research archive stocked with articles, data and info on targets drawn from the kind of artists mentioned above — such as articles on Burroughs, Robert Anton Wilson and Count Transmissions.

### Kosmigroov

www.beat.com/~arazsch/  
kosmigroov/index.html

Before slashing and burning through the steamy jungles of early '70s afro-jazz fusion, made by the likes of the "degenerate" Miles Davis, Herbie Hancock's *Sextet*, Alice Coltrane, Connie Lydon Smith, Marion Brown, Eddie Henderson, et al, a mailing list such as this should act as a perfect primer. Running since early 1997, Kosmigroov is available in digest form or as separate messages and operates a strict, yet controversial "minimum one live percussor" rule: the music dealt with has to have "a concentration of rhythm that's entirely human generated". This prevents subjects straying too far off-topic, although the *Jazz Saxophone* compilation is a frequent bone of contention among subscribers.

RON YOUNG

%D



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# on location

Going live: festivals, concerts, clubs in the flesh

## LHC's Seventh Annual Festival Of Experimental Music

UK: London Purcell Room & Queen Elizabeth Hall

Anti-vivisectionists argue that the great majority of experiments carried out on animals countless confirm what the scientists already know: smoking is bad for beagles. Rubbing cosmetics in rabbits' eyes makes their eyes water. And subjecting hapless festivalgoers to the sentimental ravings of half-out, old-guard bandleaders, the prep school eurythmics of half-cocked Belgian sound artists, and the humming, muttering, yavavavav of hair-brained modern Gorkucians, turns London's most docile audience into a vicious knot of caged rats nipping each other apart in a hysterical rush for the exit.

I wish. So, OK, the loudest desert most of us could muster was a disappointed mutmur on the way home after a weekend that started off short but got longer by the minute. Rage would have been far more appropriate on a number of counts, not the least being made to know how laboratory rats feel on the receiving end of repeated experiments, when the results are already known to be worthless.

Yet everyone knows that vacuous repetition isn't what the LHC means by experimental. On the contrary, the majority of this audience has stuck with the collective long enough — at its side through the previous years' festivals at the libertarian North London playgrounds, police, Conway Hall — to be fully aware that some experiments must inevitably fail, but then often as not magnificently, while those that succeed might well reveal something astonishing. This year's upgrade to the South Bank perhaps unfairly raised expectations. Maybe the choicer venue forced the LHC to retreat to the tried and tested — ROVA. Serechane Quartet, a rarely staged Cornelius Cardew score (17 years after his death, he's still a charismatic figure). German percussionist Paul Lovens, the name-packed Chris Bum's Ensemble — so as not to belyflop in front of the art establishment. Yet the bill delivered a few special events, namely rare London performances by Raimo Ojaeros and Charlemagne Palestine. And undoubtedly the LHC was knocked sideways when their star turn Pierre Henry withdrew. But on the upside, the LHC raised a few soul-powers to knock loquens cold with punches out of leftfield: the Mega-Ran Sonic trio of Fennesz, Reiberg & Vainio, Lovens's festival partner, the synthesiser player Thomas Lahn, and German trumpeter Axel Dörner.

Though the pulling power of any festival is subject to availability, when it's the highest profile showcase of an organisation like the LHC, people naturally use it to take the measure of the current state of experimental music. Though on paper the balance of

Axel Börner

adventure, innovation and celebration was promising enough — if only just — the actual listening was a great deal grimmer. Indeed, an immediate gut response, suited up from the memory of often being bored beyond belief, would judge it a critical failure. Furthermore, the nature of its failure suggested a major crisis in experimental music — that is, if there was any real meaning left in such a catchall term other than as a romantic banding of outsiders.

If one performance staged the collapse of the old guard, it was Paul Rutherford's *Iskra*. In their defence, they were late replacements for Pierre Henry, and touring commitments prevented them getting to the South Bank until moments before they went on. But the core of Rutherford's sorry performance went way beyond tiredness. It was more like total fatigue — of the music, his obsolete methods and, saddest of all, his "radical" politics, which consisted of lipfaced salutes and trades against Thatcher (eh?) if his all-star group was a bulwark against the forces of reaction, that too seemed ready to disintegrate. It's hard to imagine high-calibre players like Evan Parker, Keith Tippett, Howard Riley and Louis Moholo will want a return engagement of this embarrassing display. Rutherford's failure to adequately "direct" them through the project's solo



Funness, Rehberg & Vainio



Pauline Oliveros

after Confucius's teachings as the means for any number of untrained singers and musicians to compose the peace they own. In Saturday's version this amounted to a reconstituted Socratic Orchestra, ie a massive, ad-hoc choir shuffling around aimlessly while contributing to the work's simple, mixed harmonies — impressive in the short term, oppressively banal thereafter — for as long as any of them feared such harmonic bonding might amount to a working model of utopia for Carole and the performers. Its actual musical content here! more anyone else rapid.

Its LMC revival only showed that nostalgia for yesterday's utopian dream can't cover for the flaws in its design. Even so, there was some purpose to Carole's music. The best that can be said for the brilliant German trumpeter Axel Dörner, who opened this sorry Saturday night with a solo recital, is he led out a range of astonishing tones and effects for all to hear. Next time he might consider doing something with them.

The night before, a bunch of Belgian art school buffoons called Welinx, i, Boddendyk and Van Der Heide looked dumb and sounded dumb manipulating the air around their theremin-like sound sculptures. ROVA Saopstone Quartet were even worse. They performed the creative bankruptcy of their middlebrow experimentation when they announced they were going to play a "structured improvisation," its shape determined by idiosyncratic cards, and made it sound like they were about to parachute behind enemy lines. I counted four out and, sad to say, I counted

four back in, all of them unsatisfied.

The partial successes of the first night were not enough to make you leave feeling optimistic. Chris Burns Ensemble squandered its considerable resources searching around in their instruments' gravely zones. While Paul Lovens's rhythmicists are always a joy, his partner Thomas Lehn used his synthesizer to dyscous the drummer's route with impacted bricks of noise. Closing the festival the motionless power trio of Funness, Rehberg & Vainio were hardly a dynamic presence, but their digital tracking of ragged, pulsing notes through each other's circuits was positively sexy.

Over the course of the weekend, the festival did turn up some few genuine highlights. Les Döboulours' Maggie Nichols scolding kept weaving the festival gloom until it cracked into laughter. Despite the aura of cynicism surrounding most everything he touches, Stefan Jaworski couldn't disguise the sheer delight he took in the electric screams of noise he took from his guitar. Dedicating her improvisation to a dying friend, Pauline Oliveros pinned rippling ribbons of notes onto the gasping lungbrats emitted from her accordion's bellows, over which she intemperately keened an affecting wordless lament. Finally surrounded by snuffed toys, Charismae Palestine wailed at the piano with such pounding ferocity that the rising furies of notes coagulated into dense, harmonically rich chords howling in mid-air like they were his own private clouds of joy. After Palestine, most everything else felt like rain.

HIBA KOPF

## Barry Adamson UK, London Emporium

It's been more than ten years since Barry Adamson last stepped out live with Nick Cave. And The Bad Seeds — the odd secret warm-up concert notwithstanding — and tonight he seems to be in no rush to return to the stage as a bandleader. The interminable wait allows you time to take in the Emporium's surrounds: overhead, a huge cast-iron chandelier, adorned with spike-infused metal spheres, spans the club's languid, smoky cabaret ambience with a hint of S&P. Stage and sightline deficiencies aside, it's an ideal setting for Adamson's onetime soundworld. Clad in the finest bespoke tailoring, he and his group (including former Orange Juice and Josef K guitarist Malcolm Ross) hit right in when they finally walk to the set.

Immediately kicking into "Dea Voood" Adamson's scenario begins to take shape. Here, the composer of imagined soundtracks (*Moss Side Story*, *Soul Murder* and *Oedipus Schmoedipus*) is reasserting himself as Barry Adamson the song stylist of his new album *As Above*. So Bellow-Well, it's more a minor deviation in genre, really, in which he reads a jazz-infused Beat poet ethic to the waning darkness of his trade-mark oeuvre. We introduce his fledgling cool-American cousin on the new material. His voice intemperately muttering into a half-spoken simulation of traditional blues patter, Adamson sounds fine in the lower octaves, but he struggles to reach the opening number's higher ranges. His vocal difficulties

passages and missed choruses was indicative, perhaps, of a loss of faith in the whole notion of port-improvised compositions. The whole was capped by Rutherford's boorish MC act where he splattered the same laddish group introductions — "This is, er, I can't remember his name... Evan Parker" or such like — at the beginning and end of their truncated piece. It should have been three hours long, he warned. So God is alive after all.

Rutherford's *Iskra* followed an inimitable version of paragraph seven of Confucius, *The Great Learning*. Repetitively running to some seven hours in its complete form, Carole devised the work



Barry Adamson

continue into the ambitious "Come Hell Or High Water," a song that "would test a singer with three times Adamson's range" according to one critic. Thankfully, his pitch eveners out as his confidence grows. Like Tindersticks' Stuart Staples, Adamson is at his best when he stays within the limitations of his semi-baritone.

He sounds great on the souching montage of "Jazz Devil," a piece inspired by the ordeal of his replacement operation. It was during his lengthy hospital recuperation that the seeds of *All Above* sown in his imagination. Describing it as an extension of the New Orleans voodoo movie *Angel Heart*, Adamson casts himself as a detective who investigates himself. Like the lead voice in a Mickey Spillane novel, his sleazy narration slips into verbosity at times, but with good reason, as his baroque language simultaneously evokes the mood of character and place, while at the time mooring on the plot. His lyrical dexterity borders surreal comedy in lines like "You play the instruments and I play the button" ("Jazz Devil"), while the prophetic "Following my every little movement from the scene" ("Can't Get Loose") traces the cursory shift from dark jokes inspired by film to vocal belated corrections.

Adamson ups the tension and menace of the music by reorchestrating orchestral samples off a Dub-Hop matrix ("Come Hell Or High Water"). But much to Adamson's annoyance it seems the audience hasn't cottoned onto the show's narrative structure, going by their habit of shouting out requests all night. His agitation peaks at the end of "Still I Rise" when he splutters the closing words, "Devil

isn't playin' in j... with all this music he can master." Yet when it looks like he's about to close with the urgings of the *Black* group Magazine's "Pleasure," come a swell! Howard Devoto's tearfully reinterpreted lyrics: "I will drag you and fuck you Or Hell Pleasure!"

The invariable soundtrack format *Adamson* devised for his first three albums gives him the distance he needs to communicate to an outside audience personal matters re: family, race, death, oedipal neuroses and crippling physical pain. That unconscious trilogy had certainly earned him the right to stage his concerns as a moving entertainment in the swart grandeur of the Emporium. The pictures his live soundtracks conjured in the minds of the audience are too vivid to stay invisible.

VELVET PAVLE KIC

## Voodoo Nation

UK: London Bagley's Studio

Bagley's nightclub in London's King's Cross is a weird place to be initiated into the mysteries of voodoo. But perhaps this Happy House Haven is a shrewd choice for the organizers, whom intent on buying voodoo's zombie image so as to reclaim it, both as a living religion and as part of Hain's heritage. In the club's side rooms, the Haitian group Boukman Eksperyans recycle the cult's rhythms in a more user-friendly form, incorporating elements of reggae and rock and DJ's mix Haitian Ra Ra music with funk and McHoop before a backdrop of flickering monochrome films depicting arcane religious rituals.

But in the main room, a motley crowd of eco-traders, gaffs and dourly speakers have

the flesh. Before it commences, servers and models of happy and pose at the altar for photographers. The altar itself is decorated with bottles of rum, pottery cups wrapped in cloth and pictures of Catholic saints. These odd items represent how different Voodoo spirits sometimes take over Christian icons — the Virgin Mary becomes Marie Lavee, for example.

All religions have absorbed elements of those they reduced, but even so voodoo is a special case. Created by slaves transported from dozens of African nations and thrown together in Haiti, voodoo fused some of their original beliefs with the Christianity forced upon them by the slaveholders. No mean feat, considering they had no common language to begin with.

Presiding over the ceremony is the 'Voodoo Oungan' Edgard Jean-Louis, a wiry, grey-moustached man with a twinkling, infectious smile and a stare capable of stopping traffic at 100 paces. An authoritative figure, for sure, but how do you know what to make of a spiritual leader who brandishes a machete and greets trusted participants by springing run in their faces?

The ceremonial pulse ripples across the different beats of three drums, the manzan the pape and the boula. The manzan drummer beats out a fierce attack on the largest, while the boula drummer keeps time on the smallest, building rhythms that are alternately killing and maddening. But they get under the skin of even a sober observer like me. Throughout the ceremony, I feel the hair rising up on the back of my neck.

In one corner stands the potoman, a ladder by which the lwa descend into the world to possess the initiates. By Anglo-Saxon standards, these possession scenes are pretty damn alarming, as the spirit ride their host bodies in response to the call of the drums, causing one woman to stagger around for several minutes before falling convulsed to the floor.

It all ends much as it started with everyone smiling. Some observers expressed disappointment that no chickens were sacrificed. But even in this unnatural setting the ceremony had an eerie, unsettling aura. Haiti's voodoo rhythms pick up the heartbeat of a troubled people.

PIKE SHALLCROSS



Burning the voodoo down at Bagley's



## The Third Annual Vision Festival

USA: New York Orensans Art Centre

Taking place in a 19th-century former synagogue on New York's Lower East Side, the Third Annual Vision Festival might not be exactly a salon du refusé, but it was the ultimate alternative to the swelling corporate tenor of the city's marmoth, sugar-daddied Teasaco and JVC jazzfests. Anti-run and explicitly not-for-profit, the festival ran 50 performances over eight nights. — I could make you sick with envy just by listing the shows I missed.

The branchid of dancer Rainha Nicholson (supported by her husband, bassist William Parker, and Steven Joerg of the AUM Fidelity label), the festival is a multimedia event incorporating music, poetry, art and dance. If the venue's religious origins are entirely appropriate to the festival's ecstacy, communion of art, music and audience, to acoustic curies are facile, to say the least. Some performers managed to project a robust roar while others strained awkwardly to fill its massive space, their sets forced to compete with noises bleeding in from functions in neighboring rooms. Sound problems aside, the festival was indeed "the place to be this week," as Boston-based guitarist Joe Morris enthused.

You know something's happening when Superchunk and Yo La Tengo can be spotted in a deer-tête-à-tête at the back of the hall. Their presence is indicative of how far — and quite possibly, why — the current audience for this music has changed. The crowd is exceedingly white, male and

twentysomething, and was most likely smashing their heads on the punk rock just a few years ago. However peculiar and encouraging this new demographic engine may be, it is reflected in Adam's Gold Sparrow Band, a burning quartet of well-dread jazz acolytes whose take on 20th-century music includes jazz, rock and a whole lot more. William Parker himself seems to have taken them under his wing, going by his glowing introduction. Aside from a suite specially written for the festival, the quartet won friends by covering the tunes of their distinguished Atlanta mentors, Marion Brown and Sonoro.

The week opened with an invocation ceremony conducted by readman Joseph Jaraman, who led The Art Ensemble Of Chicago in 1991 to pursue his Buddhist faith. He current too belated out a sharply sweet set of tunes highlighted by a New Orleans type number in a simple major key melody, with martial swing accompaniment. Myra Melford's harmonium contribution demonstrated why she's the keyboardist of choice for the likes of Noah Howard and Dave Douglas.

Tim Berne's Paraphrase, featuring the rhythm team of Drew Gress and Tom Ranney, bleated through a long, dark, shrookling set

of trio improvisations, followed by the Frank Lowe Quartet. Lowe's recent tirings of Coleman Hawkins-like tradition were bold and worthwhile. Ex-Pingus trumpeter Jack Walker belated the proceedings, while the smoother but still-teaching tone of Lowe's tenor rang sweet and true.

Though NYC's jazz avant-garde featured heavily, the festival was held under the rubric of Creative Music, which permitted it to take in jazz, freejazz and World Music, among other genres. Groups like Jason Koo Hwang's Far East Side Band exploded doors to forge a singular improvisational vernacular. Alongside Hwang's violin scrawl were Sang-Won Park's loquagium runs and leering vocal, Santo Takeishi's percussive and veteran Joe Daley's enigmatic tuba stylings.

Though only three years down the line, the festival has established the tradition of a non-hierarchical marquee where an unsung genius such as Daniel Carter or Cooper-Moore can share equal billing with a Matthew Shipp or a Charles Gayle. For my money, Carter is New York's top resident right now. Playing with a deadly intensity of purpose, he possesses a fractured lyricism that betrays his motley band/R&B grounding. He man ensembles, Test (with Sabir Mubarek, Tom Bruno and Matt Heyner) and Other Dimensions In Music (with Roy Carabott, William Parker and Rashied Baker) performed on the same night, and the man blazed straight through both exhaustive sets like a wild sun. Just as important a guru figure is poet and instrument builder Cooper-Moore, who led his own quartet, and then eloquently smeared tonalities with Bill Cole's.



### Untempered Ensemble

The festival is also notorious for being one of the only public places to see the legendary percussion shaman Milford Graves, who more normally plays to private audiences in his basement. Perched dead center of a killer quartet featuring William Parker, Charles Gayle and the New Orleans-based educator and saxophonist Edward "Kidd" Jordan, Graves radiated pure heat and light, as he emitted high pitched multiphonic vocal bleats. Some people stood worthy of The Killer himself, and danced like the mutant offspring of



### Buster Keaton and Min Tanaka trying out for The Rock Steady Crew

Having to follow a set of such daunting firepower is a fairlark task. Yet everyone stuck around for Peter Kowald's quartet, who proceeded to scratch out a beautiful, droning transmutation swell with Jin Hi Kim on a Korean koraungu, Xu Feng Xia on Chinese ghuang, and Gunda Gotschko's good old violin. Kowald exuded a paternal warmth and command, calmly caressing his bass as he directed the flow to turn out one of the festival's most original and gripping sets.

On the penultimate evening, William Parker's Little Huey Creative Music Orchestra erected a mesmerizing cry sprawl of sound. Dense slow marches mapped out awesome psychocoustic constellations that were polyphonic, polyvalent, and truly sublime. On the final night, members of Little Huey doubled as the Jimmy Lyons Big Band, by way of tribute to the longtime Cecil Taylor Unit also saxophonist. This kind of historical link defines the spirit of the Vision Festival. It bridges gaps between time and place, and ensures that the tradition of creative organic music survives as a viable grassroots urban folk music in New York. As William Parker put it, "The music will be played because it has to be."

AC LEE

### Robert Wilson & Philip Glass: *Monsters Of Grace*

UK: London Barbican Theatre

Philip Glass has stated that opera marked the way forward for his music, because it allowed him to explore greater artistic corners, make a musical theatre format with popular audience appeal. He has been staging his music since the mid-70s, when he first collaborated with theatre director Robert Wilson on *Ernst On The Beach*. The combination of Glass's amplified minimalist music, and Wilson's usual minimal — on a grand scale — stage design costumes and lighting, pioneered a new kind of minimalist-monumental spectacle that both cowed and wowed audiences with the novelty of its size and awantness. Scale has become the defining characteristic of Glass opera as like *Akhmet* and multimedia works like *Koyaanisqatsi* and *La Bête Et La Belle*. On the evidence of the *Monsters Of Grace* opera, the *Black Rider*, Bobby still thinks big, too.

The added novelty factor of Glass and Wilson's latest collaboration *Monsters Of Grace* — "a digital opera in three dimensions" — is the 3D effect. (Like, theatre isn't already three dimensional?)

Musically the show is a success. Sonically based on samples of Oriental instruments, this



The Monsters Of Glens audience in 3D

is easily Glens's most seductive score for some time. Written for his small ensemble and four singers, led by the composer himself at the keyboards, the music's rhythmic complexities here have the space to dance freely untroubled by the weighty textures that, after his full orchestral scores, inevitably, the tempo don't vary hugely, but the interweaving of Glens's trademark arpeggios is done with considerable subtlety and pizzazz.

The libretto consists of texts from the 12th century Persian Suli poet Rumi, whose passion is counterpointed by the cooler visuals. So, what of the show's selling point: the 3D images projected by Wilson's (trademarked) Synthesians device? The London performances were hailed by a rash of enthusiastic reviews from America, topped by a claim in *The Los Angeles Times* that Glens and Wilson were "shaking up art." Not that he has a stake in the matter, but producer Jedediah Wilson considers *Monsters Of Glens* to be "21st century theater," adding "a new generation of theatre audiences will be excited by what can be created using state of the art digital media."

Well, on the evidence of the UK premiere the Americans were speculating somewhat prematurely. The show starts off with a scene called "Where Music Is Everything," where a rectangular screen shows colours metamorphosing like a kinetic Mark Rothko painting. The main screen comes down for a section called "Don't Go Back To Sleep," which cues the audience to don their 3D specs and virtually enter a twilight village scene at rooftop level. The fusion of floating down to earth, where a child on a bicycle gradually comes into view, is beautifully sustained.

Such 3D film segments are projected between Wilson's more familiar frozen theatrical tableaux, where figures make their way in slow motion through harshly lit, mostly empty scenes scattered with a few telltale signs of life — an illuminated water tank and a burning toaster, for example.

Podknighted with so few objects, the desolate nature of Wilson's staging inevitably encourages the audience to seek out their symbolic meaning. But their creator makes no

such claim for them. In his programme notes Wilson says: "I'm not giving you puzzles to solve, only pictures to hear." Well, he's not kidding when he suggests there's nothing much to them. The banality of his imagery is only superficially alleviated by the 3D effect. It might project the audience inside his pictures, but it cannot give them real depth.

Mistakes were not helped by technical problems that marred many of the eight 3D episodes on the opening night. Because the projections were not aligned properly, you had to squint to see the image whole. (But even after the technical problems were corrected, audiences reported difficulties in resolving the 3D pictures.)

Regardless of its technical failings, *Monsters* is certainly spectacular entertainment. But is it really a case of "high tech meets high art," as one American critic somewhat preposterously proclaimed? The quality of Glens's music is undeniable, but Robert Wilson's habitual monumentalism rings hollow.

**PIKE BARNES**

## Gekko

Sweden Stockholm  
Munchenbryggeriet

Stockholm, it has to be said, just doesn't rock. Its low-density population disperses itself across the mini-archipelago of islands spanned by the city, leaving the centre bright clean and so free of sleaze, it's depressing. Indeed, it's tempting to say Stockholm had to import it to pep up the party held to celebrate it becoming this year's European city of culture. But that would be to deny the handful of producers, most notably the Chicago-influenced Cam Leakebusch, working to put Sweden on the Techno map. But maybe in laying on two nights of innovative Electronica, performance art and art installations, the Gekko event is being a little too ambitious.

Indeed, it has problems working up a decent audience to fill its cavernous main hall. Staring into its yawning emptiness must be a demoralising experience, specially for acts who travelled to get here. On his excellent debut LP, Micko Westermarck, aka The Bowling Green, combines the gentle humour of English psychedelia, the polysexual aggression of Gam and the mix 'n' match wandery of drum 'n' bass. But though he adds some live instruments to his DAT full of sequences, all of them brimming with ideas and ambition, he still can't raise enough fire power to storm the empty spaces.

The artsy programmed to play the smaller room have it easier. James Handway grabs live double bass and sets one his jazzy drum 'n' bass. If his records are either too bland or too clever, his Stockholm performance is exciting and well received. He agreed "I thought we were the best thing here," he boasts later, with an air of jazz imagination. The *Fast Show* crew would be hard pressed to agree.

Bandula's thunderground Techno is electric enough to draw a marginally bigger crowd into the main hall, giving emaciated MC Lucian

Thompson something to work on. His erratic, puppet dancing responds to the punishing kick drums and steamy rattling bass frequencies that John O'Connell and Janet Bostrom wrestle from their circuits. Refreshingly, they have not yet succumbed to cranking out the crowd-pleasing rock squawk samples so beloved of Technoclubs like Underworld.

The following night, performance art kicks in with a vengeance. Iceland's Love Company are a group of beaming Nordic women in lab coats and heavy make-up whose act consists of melting a large block of ice to get at a giant lipstick. They got my vote until I heard about one Oveig Kuik, who hung himself naked from the ceiling in imitation of a glossy disco ball. Not sure I know what it all means, but it beats podium dancers.

The weekend's revelation, however, is the excellent Co-Fusion. Two tough Japanese boppers punched over decks and maimed emptying musicbeds of snoring breakbeats into startling scores of white noise, out of which emerges a dynamic blend of UFO-style 21st century jazz. Photo's borsai-instyle drum edits and CJ Bolland's early Hardcore

Max Brennan is just as impressive, bouncing kickdrums belly-slapping bass against string-laden Detroit rhythms. It, to paraphrase the overworked Derrick May formula, Techno is Kraftwerk and George Clinton jamming in an elevator. This is the floor where Bootsy joins them.

Dutch DJ Steve Reichman is the last man at the decks. Though his revolution is built on the delicate TechnoHouse interface he carried out on labels such as Derrick May's Fragile, tonight he opts for a heady, crowd-pleasing set of tough kickdrum Techno — and no crowd in a room can resist the anoning bass thunder of Hilbert's "Sailing To Enchantment". In this, Reichman proves the Swedes are no different.

**PIKE SMALLCROSS**



Bandula's Techno house

# new notes at a glance

## information from spnm

july/august

### 1.7RCM Sinfonietta

Messiaen  
Caen Hall, Royal College of  
Music, Prince Consort Road,  
London SW7 0171 583 3643

### Krzysztof Penderecki Beethoven, Penderecki, Haydn

Draper's Hall, Theognosia St.,  
London EC2 0171 638 8891

### The Academy of Ancient Music

Taverner\*\*\* Purcell  
St Andrew Holborn, Holborn  
Circus, London EC4  
0171 638 8881

### 2Music for two, three and four hands

Albenga, Auri, Bowles,  
Cage, Copland, Cowell,  
Crawford Seeger, Kagel,  
Pischnan, Poulenc, Satie,  
Shostakovich, Taillefer,  
Waller  
Sutton House, 2-4 Hemstead  
High St, London 0181 966  
226/03221

### Evelyn Glennie

Zikovic, Masson, Abe,  
Gordon, Schwarzwasser,  
Rzewski, Home  
Spaulfield Market Opera, Old  
Spaulfield Market, London E1  
0171 638 8891

### Trinity College Goldschmidt Series

Goldschmidt\*\*\*  
JSS  
3Reeding Out Loud  
Stravinsky,  
Mozart, Riley\*\*\*  
All Saints Church, Old  
Mileworth, Middlesex 0181 940  
3633

### 4-19Gheithenham International Music Festival

Benjamin\*\*\* Bergman\*\*\* M  
Berkeley\*\*\* Britten\*\*\*  
Boyle\*\*\* Brynner\*\*\* Butler\*\*\*  
Carter\*\*\* Cashin\*\*\* Cox\*\*\*  
Ellis\*\*\* Janáček\*\*\* Knight\*\*\*  
Ligeti\*\*\* Lloyd\*\*\* M  
Osborne\*\*\* N Osborne\*\*\*  
Reeves\*\*\* Tsai-Nakanishi\*\*\*  
Wor\*\*\* Williams\*\*\* Wilson\*\*\*  
Cheltenham 01262 237377

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Benjamin\*\*\* Bergman\*\*\* M  
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Ellis\*\*\* Janáček\*\*\* Knight\*\*\*  
Ligeti\*\*\* Lloyd\*\*\* M  
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Reeves\*\*\* Tsai-Nakanishi\*\*\*  
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Boyle\*\*\* Brynner\*\*\* Butler\*\*\*  
Carter\*\*\* Cashin\*\*\* Cox\*\*\*  
Ellis\*\*\* Janáček\*\*\* Knight\*\*\*  
Ligeti\*\*\* Lloyd\*\*\* M  
Osborne\*\*\* N Osborne\*\*\*  
Reeves\*\*\* Tsai-Nakanishi\*\*\*  
Wor\*\*\* Williams\*\*\* Wilson\*\*\*  
Cheltenham 01262 237377

### 4Portsmouth New Music Orchestra

Bailey, Pliot, Knott, Ives,  
Dietz  
Pennyfold Festival Hall,  
Hampshire 01705 351816

### Trinity College Goldschmidt

St Bartholomew's Church,  
Bristol 01273 709709

### Highgate Choral Society

Gershwin, Bernstein,  
Taverner, Philips\*\*\*  
St Michael's Church, South  
Green, London NW 0181 444  
8230

### 6ReSound

Lowell, Decca\*\*\*  
Impett\*\*\* Feldman, Souter  
West Road Concert Hall,  
Cambridge CB2 01223  
504444

### Harle & Bennett Poulenc, Corré, Britten, Harle, Bartók, Schulhoff, Sondheim, RR Bennett

Immanuel Hall, Sheffordbury  
Place, London EC2  
0171 638 8881

### 7Clarinets & piano

Carter, Butler, Usher,  
Cole, Finnissy, Berkeley  
BMIC

### \*9spnm Showcase

Crumb, Penderecki,  
Cox\*\*\* Osborne\*\*\* Wilson\*\*\*  
16-19 year-old composers\*\*\*  
Pavlov Pump Room,  
Cheltenham 01262 227079

### Anthony Green, piano

Bach, Birt, Foster\*\*\*  
Graham, Green\*\*\* Last  
BMIC

### Trinity College Goldschmidt

Spaulfield Market Opera,  
4-5 Lamb Street, London E1  
0171 377 1362

### \*10spnm Showcase

Bartók, Purcell, Tsai\*\*\*  
Reeves\*\*\* Williams, 16-19  
year-old composers\*\*\*  
Pavlov Pump Room,  
Cheltenham 01262 227079

### 10Trinity College Goldschmidt

Spaulfield Market Opera,  
4-5 Lamb Street, London E1  
0171 377 1362

### 11Imagined Sounds

Barnet, McGarr,  
Nergler\*\*\* London  
Composers' Forum,  
Firenza, Montague, van  
Dampt, South Palestrina\*\*\*  
Cry of St George-on-the-East  
The Highway, London E1  
0171 247 7736

### Portsmouth District Composers' Alliance

Beethoven, Poulenc-Evans,  
Knott, Read, Pliot\*\*\*  
Bailey, Brahms  
Eden House, West Street,  
Chichester 01203 526255

### Trinity College Goldschmidt

Spaulfield Market Opera, 4-5  
Lamb Street, London E1  
0171 377 1362

### A Celebration of Gay Composers

Berners, Ely, Nunn, Rossini,  
Nettle & Markham, Poulenc  
St James' Church, Sussex  
Gardens, London W2 0171  
277 5814

### Richmond Orchestra

Fern\*\*\* Copland, Haydn  
Queen Charlotte Hall, Richmond,  
Richmond 01752 810222

### 14Choir and Strings

Home, Bliss, Kelly\*\*\*  
St Giles Clogges, Barbican,  
London EC2 0171 359 0559

### 15Amadeus Chorus

Copland, Bernstein,  
Krig, Shostakovich  
Bath Abbey, Bath BA1  
01225 463362

### Michael Chance

Downland, Bargon, McNeill  
Vivian's Hall, Lower Thames St,  
London EC1 0171 638 8891

### 16XXVI International Viola Congress

Henze, Ligeti, Milon,  
Takemitsu, Stravinsky,  
Bartók, Beethoven,  
Brahms  
Stewart Hall, RSAMD,  
Glasgow G2 0141 334 4867

### 16B3 Classic

McCabe, Newton\*\*\*,  
Johnstone, Zalloa\*, Garcia  
del Valle\*\*\*  
BMIC

### XXVI International Viola Congress (2)

JS Bach, Telemann, Webb,  
Biber, Castello, Purcell,  
Kriemhammer, Muffatt  
RSAMD, Glasgow G2  
0141 334 4867

### 17Fabio Zanon

Sor, Scarlatti,  
Willa-Lobos, Fania\*,  
Ardevol, Ponce, Miranda\*  
Wigners Hall, St Wigners St,  
London W1 0171 935 2141

### 18-18Music Festival

Berthelette etc  
Abercrombie International Music  
Festival 01970 522889

### 18XXVI International Viola Congress (3)

Telemann, Alcyon,  
Mackie\*\*\* McGarr  
RSAMD, Glasgow G2  
0141 334 4867

### 19Portsmouth New Music Orchestra

Haydn  
Oldfield's House, 316 Lamb  
St, Portsmouth 01705  
351816

### 21Ian Pace, piano

Schubert, Janáček,  
Taylors\*\*\* Schindler,  
Skempston, Newman,  
Finney\*\*\*  
BMIC

### Hooloo and the African Xylophone Quartet

PR

### 22A PLG / Rhythm Sticks Event

Trad, Poulenc, Russell,  
Harron, Bastock, Heath,  
Schwartzner, Masson,  
Fiken, Skempston, Lembrick  
QEH

### 1.8Organ Duo

Lecocasi, Mozart,  
Susato, Heworth,  
Beethoven, Thompson,  
Calahan, Bedard  
Carnegie Forum, Carnegie  
01730 267341

### 4Paul Robinson and Harmonie Band

Robinson, Sate  
Art Centre, Cambridge  
01223 503333 or 047330

### 7Hillard Ensemble

Hobbs\*\*\* Bryans,  
Feldman, Pärt, White,  
Metzger, Ludke, Robinson,  
Steele, Hackett\*\*\*  
Emmanuel LRC, Trumpington  
St, Cambridge 01223 503333

### Composers' Forum

Trinity Hall, Trinity Lane,  
Cambridge CB2 01223  
807330

### 27-1.9

Prelestige Festival  
Berkeley, Poulenc, Russian  
music, Powers  
Preston, Pops LD8  
01544 267600

### 29Ensemble intercontemporain

Boulez, Varèse, Stravinsky,  
Schönberg, Ligeti  
Edinburgh International Festival  
0131 473 2000

### 30BBC Scottish SO

Boulez  
Edinburgh International Festival  
0131 473 2000

### 30Ensemble intercontemporain

Carter, Manouss, Boulez  
Edinburgh International Festival  
0131 473 2000

### KEY:

\*9spnm event  
\*\*\* World Premiere  
\*\* UK Premiere  
\* London Premiere

### BH Barbican Hall, Silk Street, London EC2

0171 638 8891

### BMIC British Music Information Centre, Stratford Place, London

W1 0171 499 8567

### JSS: St John's, Smith Square, London SW1

0171 222 1061

### RHF, QEH, PR: South Bank Centre, London SE1

0171 960 4242

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# print run

New music books: read, raved about, roughed up



Blow-dried behemoths: Led Zep

## Stairway To Hell: The 500 Best Heavy Metal Albums In The Universe

By Chuck Eddy  
DA CAPO Pbk \$18.95

Aside from meeting Bill Ward, my ultimate Metal moment happened while listening to an American AOR radio station in the mid-80s. After a show-in contest for tickets to that night's *Blowdown*/Krokus benefit of a rock show, the DJ offered the winner a chance to say anything he wanted over the air. After what must have been 15 excruciating seconds of dead air, the kid's

eventual response was, "Krokus are gonna rock!" No one has articulated the inarticulate adoration that speaks for Heavy Metal better than Chuck Eddy in *Stairway To Hell*.

Ostensibly a consumer guide to the 500 best Heavy Metal records, and now reprinted with an appendage featuring the best Metal albums of the '90s, *Stairway To Hell* is really a steel-toed boot in the throat of the received liberal petties of any number of counter-culture literatures (including music journalism), just as Black Sabbath was to the first *Summer of Love*. And just like *Paranoid* and *Plasters Of Reality*, Eddy's critique is filled with pomp-destroying jackhammer riffing, a class

antagonism barely contained below the surface, more jackhammer rifting, an unmistakable voice spanning to be heard above the din, and more jackhammer rifting. Eddy reads like a populist Lester Bangs without the self-destructive tendencies.

Eddy celebrates any number of suburban Saturday nights aimlessly groping in the back seat to Def Leppard, doing bong hits to Led Zepplin IV, which gets Chuck's vote for the best Metal album ever, or letting a friend give you a machine to The Sex Pistols. Yet he never succumbs to mindless consensus criticism—like, 50 million teenagers can't be wrong, surely? Eddy's too smart to think that you can't analyse a riff, but not dumb enough to talk a groove to death. "The Sweet maimed the undeniable power of the hard rock riff with the undeniable power of the pop rock hook, an inevitable reaction to a world where Heavy Metal is just kiddie music anyway, a world where pregnant 14 year olds with 12 year old nates make any distinction between 'childhood' and 'adulthood' beside the point." Plus, he's the funniest thing since the inner sewer picture of Venom's *Black Metal*: "Jazz Coleman hacks and hectors like a Jewish comedian with prostate and marriage and cigar problems"; of Bachman-Turner Overdrive: "They're professionals cracking open the myth of the counterculture by reveling in the myth of privatization"; on Heavy Metal politics: "Iron Maiden and the Scorpions worship the idea of power because they're dumb enough to think they'll eventually get some"; and here's a fashion tip: "Bitty Girl's Village-People-orca-Renaissance fags are tartly enough to make Poison look male."

While Eddy's ideal-baiting may be the throat-slit. Repulse of Bruce Springsteen's blue collar, blue jean middle America, his vision of teenage wasteland is not one where the members of the O'Jays he champions would feel welcome. Only AC/DC and Led Zepplin have more envious than Parliament-Funkadelic, he creatively misquotes. Cameo in one entry ("The logic is all his own, he's the Cecil Taylor of the microphone, my Rolling Stone my ice-cream cone my twilight zone my Elia Person"), and his plowing of both The Jimmy Cassor Bunch and Teena Marie (!) in the Top 10 is an act of perversity no corpse-dismantling Satan Metal freak from Scandinavia could possibly match.

I've got my quibbles with his rankings—Celtic Frost above Slayer, King's a shade of Black In Black, Bitch Rite ahead of Nazareth—but anyone hip to both Plinkard's Rod Nangardism and Blackbird gets a double-dosed metal salute. Just like Krokus, Chuck Eddy rocks.

PETER SHAPIRO

## Serge Gainsbourg: View From The Exterior

By Alan Clayson  
SACULATORY Pbk \$12.95

## As Though I Had Wings: The Lost Memoir

By Chet Baker  
INNO Pbk \$6.99

Songwriter, singer, actor, film director, novelist, television celebrity and all-purpose cultural op-provocateur, Serge Gainsbourg had more careers than most. Rather than trying to analyse or evaluate what all that reckless productivity meant on any kind of deep level, Alan Clayson has opted instead to produce a running commentary populated by a cast of thousands. Quite a cast it is, too. Open the book at any page and play spot the celebrity—Bridgette Baurier, Monique Faithful, Jacques Brel, Paula Clark, Sacha Distel, Whitney Houston, Juliette Greco, Gerard Depardieu. Working across a range of cultural spaces, Gainsbourg was unfettered by the genre boundaries and category anxieties that plague Anglo-American music—has anyone else ever worked with both Nana Mouskouri and Sly & Robbie?

One pigmire he has been placed in is the catch-all dumping ground of kitsch. His 60s tracks crop up on Lounge compilations, the albums he wrote and produced for a succession of female starlets are being repackaged for that same market, he wrote a Eurovision Song Contest winner in 1965 and he has long been a name dropped by many addicts like Saint Etienne. Viewed through the lens of that law lamp, Gainsbourg becomes the sortful father of Eurotrash and fans of that programme will be tickled to learn from Clayson that Gainsbourg worked on French TV with the mother of Eurotrash host Antoine Des Caunès. Yet that perspective is both politically suspect—it seeks to position the French as endearing idiots, a nation of Inspector Clouseaus—and intellectually vacuous—it's the tinning mantra of 'so bad it's good' is merely a heterocultural colonization of the queer culture of camp.

Gainsbourg deserves better, but Clayson's book only hints at why. Its title is disarmingly honest—this is very much the view from the outside: elsewhere, a Gainsbourg primer for those who think they might or ought to like him but know nothing at all about French culture or history. As such, it does a lot of factual spickelwerk, and Clayson's tales and sympathies are hard to fault (on one point, a prospect of very little, he splendidly asserts the superiority of the Trages over Bruce Springsteen), but the book holds back from



The lost boy: Chet Baker

subjecting Gainsbourg's music to any sort of analysis. There's lots of content here, but not a great deal of substance. Hopefully future thoughtful critics will be able to build on Day's fascinating digression. It would be exceedingly interesting, for example, to hear a formed, angry on Gainsbourg, since his taste for scandal largely took the shape of testing the limits of sexual taboo, casting him in a troubling, ambiguous role as part Sverigi, part surrealist and part pornographer.

As *Though I Had Wings* is a leftist masquerade as a book, a few dozen double spaced and heavily illustrated pages, and as such not exactly a bargain. It is, however, curiously affecting and evocative: the bare bones of an autobiography written by one of the most glamorous casualties of jazz. Baker writes of his army career, his developing interest in music, his audition for Charlie Parker, his early career, and the first stages of the drug addiction that would blight the rest of his life. The story ends in 1963, stating as Baker's most wasted years, but also denying us his thoughts about his eventual rehabilitation.

What intrigues most about this document is when and why it was written. Was Baker planning a life story, for which these are the notes? When did he write them and why is this all there? If it's a "lost memoir" under what circumstances was it rediscovered? Annoyingly, none of this is revealed, leaving these reflections hanging like the last mysterious notes of a Baker solo. Even so, anyone who's ever been touched by the passionate restraint of his music will want to the loud, easy-going stories told here it's a foolish fantasy, of course, to imagine that this handful of jagged pieces can ever bring you closer to the man himself. But such fantasies are endemic to the relationships we try to construct with the musicians who touch us the most. As *Though I Had Wings* may be a

shameless exercise in myth mongering, but this particular myth is a hard one to resist.

ANDY NEHRIST

## Two Full Ears: Listening To Improvised Music

By Steve Day  
somebody@earthlink.net

Steve Day dismisses the reader. His prose is chatty and unassuming, littered with asides about his wife, his daughter, holidays in Greece, the listening room with its sky blue walls. By the end you've got to know him so well that voicing any criticism seems childish. However, if this beachside meditation makes your toes curl, his book is not for you. "On the rocks laid out, creamed and naked are women in varied seats changing the colour of their skin, in the words of Duke Ellington, to 'look brown and green.'" What would you have made of this Mr. Mingus? How would your imagination, if that's what it was, tried to interpret the search for a shade is nice and mellow as your own?

The affectation of that "TV" — no doubt derived from Graham Lock's renaissance of Anthony Braxton — is persistent throughout this very personal response to free jazz and improvised music, as is the rejection of the impersonal urgency of the jazz critic. Presumably, Day's homelessness is designed to make difficult music accessible, but it will also repel anyone insecure enough to demand a modicum of cool. Taken as an antidote to the cyber-glamour of a Kodwo Eshun, though, Day is amusing. After all, style wars are storms in tea cups, when it comes to the music. Sun Ra, Ornette Coleman and Coltrane (both John and Alice) are shared gods.

*Two Full Ears* implies plenitude. Day is happy with the music he listens to, and wants us to hear it too. When writing about female painters (Geri Allen, Marilyn Cosple, Joanna

McGregor and Sophia Domincich) and the South African exiles who write such a powerful and (underacknowledged) influence on London jazz and improv, Day reveals a backtick of stubborn leftism. However, though he occasionally complains about the lack of financial reward granted Evan Parker or Muhal Richard Abrams, there are no denunciations of the commercial spectacle, no sneers at pop or classical, none of the rage at utopia derived that drives critical spirits from Theodor Adorno to Bill Drummond.

Lurking amid the deft amateurishness (Paul Moton? Kevin Ayers? Don Byron?) and hippie idealism (Day blunders each time he mentions royalties), there is some incisive criticism. This is not the pukeome stream of clichés printed in those magazines that bemoan the "jazz" word on every page. Day draws links between Ornette Coleman's tunes and Thelonious Monk, the trade in favour of Science Fiction, Ornette's stunning, out-of-print pan-harmonic blueprint, is terrific. Day comes in on an underrated web recording by Charles Mingus, *On Youth* — with observations that explode any talk of dialogue with much some disobedience happening today. Day reads the miserable diary of Philip Larkin's jazz column against the grain to hilarious and illuminating effect. He shows what Anthony Braxton learned from John Zorn's Hangeberg, and calls John Zorn "a genuine Phil Woods".

Day writes brilliantly about Muhal Abrams, someone who has actually achieved the synthesis of modern music everyone is supposedly looking for — and is still criminally ignored. You can feel the jazz stranglehold slip off as Day recounts how Lol Coziff's brilliant solo at a Jon Garbarek gig had the majority of the audience retreating to the bar.

A judicious editor would have pointed out that citing John Cage as a reason for buying records is daft (committed to his role as art composer, Cage was utterly uninterested in recording records) and queried Day's lay rumour! takedown of Frank Zappa's performance of "433" as "crazy". The accompanying CD covers a lot of ground, albeit with excerpts. Heavily reliant on Bill jazz, only relies to greatness when Anthony Braxton's *Knitting Factory* (Piano Quartet) 1994 flashes by (on which contrary to the listing, Marty Ehrlich is playing alto and Braxton piano). A judicious editor might also have asked Day to reign in his personable asides; they diminish critical authority.

On the other hand, when critics make impersonal, objective sounding judgments, it is usually a form of atomisation. For example, on a recent *PHP* release, Markus Müller states John

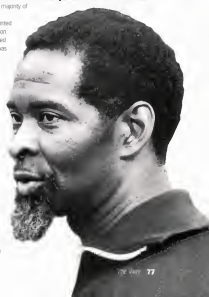
Butcher is "defining the shape of new English improvisation". Butcher is a fascinating saxophonist, but Müller's rhetoric is poisonous. The concept of aesthetic fact (intentional, defensive etc) locks living players into the kind of hierarchies established by the industry since artists are safely dead. Honest criticism is poison! It does not hide behind asinine, authoritarian objectivity, but makes a stand, brings its predilections and politics to consciousness. It acknowledges that criticism is an act, an attempt to push things in certain directions.

Day's personable style avoids pompous pronouncements, but there is nevertheless a thence lurking within *Two Full Ears*. Although he was electrified by hearing Lol Coziff, he has not bothered to hear his records. Coziff's surrealism and scorn for established values suggest new horizons, ones that include noise and trash and collage. Steve Day's heroes — Keith Tippett, Paul Dunmall, Evan Parker — are all comprehensible as fine acoustic players, masters of their craft. But to this listener, their classicism entails a limit. Dunmall plays better alongside the electric guitarists John Adams than he does in *Phagocin*, simply because the possibilities of free electric guitar are less mapped. If the English scene is going to breach the wide open spaces of *On Youth* or Science Fiction, it needs to be untrammelled in its breadth of reference and its openness to experiment.

As an account of one man's experience of improvised music, *Two Full Ears* is rich, but this listener remains unswayed by its conclusions.

SEN WATSON

Total synthesis: Muhal Richard Abrams



PHOTOS: CHET BAKER: WILLIAM CLAYTON; MUHAL: RICHARD ABRAMS: JEAN-PAUL GOSSELUX



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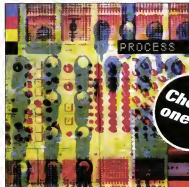




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# WIRE

# epiphanies

Rob Young gets fuzzy over Felt's mid-80s angst

Those of us born in the years AC (After Coltrane) were twice cursed: Not only were our formative years spent under the grip of Thatcherism, we were also made to feel like lacrimers at music's bounteous feast. Not for us the firsthand mind expansions of psychedelia, intellectual curiosity of Progressive rock, nor the life-changing nihilism of punk. Hell, even Sonic Youth had burned up five years of glorious existence before they came my way — at the Tropic Club in Bristol, on their *Evol* tour in 1986. Which is not to say that there weren't uplifting, even destiny-shaping musical events going on in our time. It's just that digging out those records now has the same effect as if I'd invited an old acquaintance to a party, only to find them squatting in the corner all night, throwing food around and sniping at my newer friends.

Many of those records were centred around the fledgling Creation label, which actually marketed itself as a stream of epiphanies on vinyl. Acid House there was, but stuck in my final school year in the West Country, it all looked like just another bunch of tie-dyed London bonies out on the lam. No, all we had to do was read the music press, tune to John Peel and hit the record racks.

It must have been on one of those late night Peel shows that I first heard Felt: Peel, as ever, was reflecting a broad sweep of alternative music: balmy American guitar grunge, roots reggae, the short-lived 'shambling' groups like Bogshed and Big Flame that are surely due for their own revival any day now, and the anorak pop briefly championed by Simon Reynolds. Amid all this, Felt's "Primitive Painters" single sparkled like a sapphire in slurry. Tingling guitar harmonics glowing like Tom Verlaine's television solos, reverberant Spanish guitar like the sun dappling a Montserrat cloister, and a guest vocal from The Cocoon Twins' Liz Frazier that finally raised her out of the Twins' student-art-geek ghetto. But it was the voice at the centre that really got me: in the middle of all the studiously constructed sumptuousness, there was the restless voice of middle England bohemia. "Just wash my Me! could be/As strange as a conspiracy/hold out hope but there's no way/I'd bring what I want to be."

Lawrence Felt's 'personality', part-Narcissus, part-Cassandra, dominated the four albums they'd already released. The bubble that encased this solitary aesthete from Birmingham was sometimes punctured, but the glimpses of naivety behind the crafted exterior only bolstered the enigma and enhanced his appeal. Once asked if he was in a relationship, he replied, "Well, there is a girl in Windsor."

The first half of Felt's career was schizophrenic indeed. Their debut single was the self-released '77, "Index/Threat II", hand lettered and issued in an edition of 500 copies. Recorded in living room mono, its

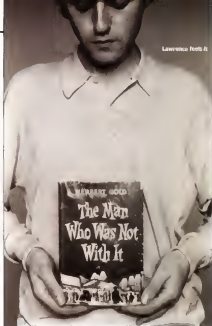
smudgy, scrubbed guitar strums, devoid of tune, words or rhythmic thrust, would put today's lo-fi illuminati to shame (it attracted the attention of Mark E. Smith, leading to support slots with The Fall). Lawrence's righthand man, Maunce Deebank, was a classically trained guitarist obsessed with the search for El Dorado. His self-penned Spanish guitar bagatelles on the early Felt albums intertwine with Lawrence's bouncier pop songs like flashes of Castile—Tedesco — sista ambience for the long, hot summer of the Falklands War. Lawrence didn't quite 'sing' at all, he'd rhythmically speak each line in a way that was impressively out of tune with the backing track. For songs like "Spanish House", on

1984's *The Strange Lobs Pattern And Other Stories*, it enhanced the sense of a slightly crazed native bending your ear with secrets for your ears only.

Late Cold War gloom spawned the grizzled nihilism of Joy Division, The Pop Group and their watered-down commercial successors like Echo And The Bunnymen. But there was a group who could turn lines like "I was feeling desperate, unable to decide/Between a life of misery and awful suicide" into quicksilver, with sprightly, four-to-the-floor rhythms cadged from Josef K. and Orange Juice. They clearly craved the elevations of television (the name Felt apparently comes from the way Tom Verlaine accents the word during "Venus"), but drummer Gary Ange's upstart stickwork has none of the fluency of a Billy Ficca. Yet they took art out of the hands of colourless no-hopers like Punishment Of Luxury and Bone Orchard, and reunited it with what was then laughably known as 'po'.

When Deebank quit in 1986, Felt replaced him with Hammond organist Martin Dutty, upped sticks from Mike Always's Cherry Red stable and threw in their lot with the groups coalescing around Alan McGee's Creation roster. They announced their arrival with a mini-album of foofing instrumentals called *Let The Snakes Consume Their Heads To Death*, and a Basement Tapes-inspired single that was also a loss-off message to Deebank. However, the lines that followed — "There's a place for abstracts/And there's a place for names/And there's a place for every kind of sound/So come on now and tell me/Why there's a void?" — endure as Felt's manifesto.

Felt never quite worked live. I saw them four times, the first in 1986 at that trusty Bristolian venue, the Tropic. All I



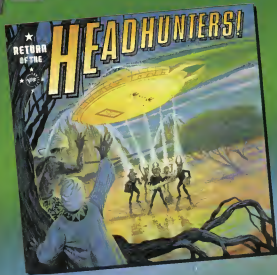
can remember is someone hollering for "1999" during the court-in to the song they played as an encore — which turned out to be a cover of Wire's "Outdog Miner".

The following year, I bulldozed my way to the front of the second stage at Glastonbury Festival, in time to hear two women in the photographers' trench, presumably a pair of Felt girlfriends, moaning about the group's backstage behaviour. "They're too busy trying to be pop stars." Of their set at an all-day Creation gathering of the clans at the Forum in North London, only the backdrop sticks in my head: oil-wheel projections whirling over sides of Paul Klee, Inca gold and Renaissance masterpieces. Finally, a dismal 'larswell' gig in a Kentish town pub hammered the last nail in the coffin: this was the Abbey Road rooftop minus the altitude.

Of course, in the face of their heroes (Dylan, Verlaine, Reed, Kerouac), Felt would always appear as pretenders. But that, in the end, was the epiphany at their career's end. They'd struggled through a decade of much bigger pretenders, newwaveists and nostalgia manufacturers, all hell-bent on fabricating a culture in which consensus could ridicule the lonely word. Somehow, the line between angst and irony had grown thinner during Felt's lifetime, and Lawrence got tired of walking it. In the end, he must have realised he wasn't going nowhere fast enough. He tore up Felt and formed the apalling Derrin, now a disturbingly pre-emptive parody of the present swathe of Britpop Mot. The Hoople emulators. His belly-flop made the choice clear: between using music as an index to the past or the future, and the collapsing weight of that failed star must be wheeling off in a search of other musical El Dorados. Felt's like there's plenty of land left to scour.



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